PREACHING FOR GREATER COMMITMENT

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This thesis-project is dedicated

to all the preachers who faithfully preach God's Word

to challenge believers' commitment to Christ and His Church.

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ABSTRACT

Front and center stands the pulpit, firm, solid and still. There stands the preacher with fear and trembling. The congregation sits in front of that pulpit nervously awaiting a fresh relevant message that has been mined out of the Sacred Book and brought forth as a customized spiritual truth for their immediate lives. Three generations, if not four, sit patiently listening to one person preach to all of their needs.

With all of the demands for the preacher's time, preaching must takes priority. In a world that focuses on convenience, preaching for commitment has become increasingly more difficult. Most preachers' desire is to be successful in their pulpit ministry by moving their people to higher commitment because they know that only by being fully committed can a believer expect to enjoy the full benefits of God.

The purpose of this thesis-project is to provide those preachers with a workable way of challenging people to move to greater levels of commitment through the faithful preaching of God's Word. The basis of this thesis-project is the authority of Scripture, the authoritative Word of God. Therefore, it is powerfully effective to bring about growth in the lives of believers. Combined with faithfully preparing and strategically preaching biblical messages, greater levels of commitment will develop in the lives of those that hear.

This thesis-project begins by laying the biblical foundation for building a case for preaching for commitment. Next, the vast field of homiletical literature will be explored to determine the best preaching method to challenge believers. Finally, the author's findings, conclusions, reflections and recommendations for preachers to design a system that challenges their audience and establishes intentional progress.

CHAPTER 1. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

One day, I heard a voice saying, "Learn of Me." Without questioning the voice, I believed it was the voice of the Lord. The voice was firm yet gentle, convincing yet not demanding. The voice was full of grace and truth. I had to listen. Because of those words from that mysterious yet familiar voice, I began a lifelong quest to learn of the Lord. On what began as a normal day in Nashville, Tennessee I was invited to make a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and grow in my relationship with Him.

For purposes of this thesis-project, commitment is demonstrated in three spiritual disciplines of the church, namely Study, Serving and Giving. The pastor's responsibility to challenge their members' commitment is based on Ephesians 4:11-13:

> And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.[1]

Preachers must preach with the understanding that people can grow and mature. Believers can increase their knowledge of scripture through faithful attendance in places where biblical education is presented. Believers are called to serve one another and others through visitation of the sick, preparing meals, and doing for others what they cannot do for themselves. Believers can grow in their level of giving and to see the need for faithful and consistent giving of time, talents and treasures (financial giving). There are many more disciplines where people can grow and mature, but for this thesis-project, these three will be examined because these three can be measured. Each of these were

[1] Ephesians 4:11-13. *(All Bible verses are New American Standard Bible Version, except where noted.)*

commanded by Jesus, demonstrated in the Book of Acts and taught by the apostles in the Epistles.

1. Study – measured in terms of attendance to Sunday school, Mid-Week Bible Studies, and other education programs of the Church based on Matthew 11:29.
2. Serving – attendance and participation in the various ministries of the church where activities are taking place based on John 13:14.
3. Giving – by offerings, time given to the church outside of worship services, and skills and talents given for the benefit of the church based on Luke 6:38.

The ultimate goal of moving believers to greater levels of commitment is that they will one day be able to lead someone through the process as well.

How are preachers going to remain relevant in a postmodern world, a world filled with cynicism and uncertainty? Preachers can remain relevant because the gospel is relevant. The Word we share is relevant, therefore, preachers can continue calling and challenging people to move to greater levels of commitments through faithfully preaching God's Word.

We live in a world where the value of commitment has diminished. Convenience has become the buzz word of our culture. Technology has made things so much more convenient; stores, movies, meals, banks and even some relationships are treated with a level of convenience. Tragically, convenience has also infected the Body of Christ. Like a virus, it has spread through the members and even into the preachers. Many preachers will say with their mouths that they desire high commitment, but their sermons are far from reaching that objective. Sermons are aimed at salvation, sin, and heaven, but seldom with an expectation of greater commitment. Concerning preacher's reluctance to

preach about commitment, Bill Hull (not to be confused with William E. Hull, who will be referenced later in this thesis-project) says, "Most pastors and church leaders I know have locked horns with the prevailing culture and honestly struggle to build high commitment. Admittedly, it is a struggle." He goes on to add, "They experience no greater challenge or frustration than to consider high commitment as the norm and attempt to communicate it and make it happen."[2] Preachers must face the challenge today of how to move believers to greater levels of commitment.

Some have described these times as "postmodern," a time when people have learned to live without absolutes and have found it difficult to exercise simple faith or make long-term commitments. In this context there seems to be an effort to strengthen the commitments in marriage, but being a preacher I believe that the root of all commitments must begin in the Lord, the Creator of the Universe. Jerry White agrees:

> This is not a marriage manual, but a challenge to commitment in the second most vital relationship of our lives. Commitment may be impossible, especially in a troubled marriage, without a more basic commitment. This basic commitment is to the lordship of Christ in your personal life and the belief that God has your best interest at heart. As you wander from your walk with God, you will also wander from your vow to your mate. God's overwhelming love for you is the only fire to ignite and keep burning to ensure your love for your spouse.[3]

Without having this commitment right all other commitments will be unfulfilling and dysfunctional.

Postmodernity is the context that basically describes the world at the turn of the twenty-first century; therefore, it sets forth the setting for the problem of low or stagnant commitment. The postmodern person looks at the world with a different perspective than their parents and their grandparents who lived thirty or forty years ago. Craig Loscalzo

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[2] Bill Hull, *Building High Commitment in a Low Commitment World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1995), 14.
[3] Jerry White, *The Power of Commitment* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1985), 84.

delineated some of the characteristics of the postmodern way of thinking. He suggested that the postmodern mindset is characterized by a love/hate relationship with the technological advances of the previous generation. Their parents saw technology as the ultimate answer to the world's problems. It guaranteed a better life by saving time. They were told if machines could be constructed to accomplish chores previously done by hand, the time saved could be used for intellectual pursuits, family fun, and recreational activities. "What happened?" laments Loscalzo,

> Everyone has washing machines, clothes dryers, dish-washers, ice-dispensing refrigerators, microwave ovens, garbage disposals, trash compactors, hair dryers, self-propelled lawn mowers, telephone answering machines, access to the information superhighway. Everyone has all these things, but no one has time....Postmodernist [sic] strive not to be duped by such naïve promises.[4]

This frustration with technology is not the only frustration many living in a postmodernist culture feel. Marvin McMickle speaking to African-American preachers says, "Young black people...born after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. are becoming increasingly disinterested in the attempts by their parents and teachers to define everything in strict racial terms. They actually have no frame of reference that allows them to see the world through that lens."[5] Some share the postmodernist's view of society as people living in harmony which is a prime tenet of postmodernism.

Consequently, "politically correct" speech emerged. Whatever is said is expected to be in harmony with the community, and speakers must at all times speak in harmony the feelings of others. The preacher who desires to reach this generation, must have the confidence to declare in the voice of the Lord, and in the words of Paul, "for I am not

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[4] Craig A. Loscalzo, "Apologizing for God: Apologetic Preaching to a Postmodern World," *Review & Expositor*, 3 (1996): 408.

[5] Marvin A. McMickle, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 13.

ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..."[6] The postmodern mind sees the fully committed lifestyle as not practical because it contributes to the lack of harmony. Therefore, their commitment is low and stagnant.

Many preachers have done an excellent job communicating to their members as well as to non-members the gospel message of the free gift of salvation based on God's grace and human faith. However, many of these same preachers have failed to communicate the need to express our gratitude for this free gift. Preachers of the gospel have failed to challenge their members to greater levels of commitment to learn of Christ, to serve others and to give sacrificially. Preachers fail miserably short of describing a life of total commitment to Christ. Once people accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, after making that initial commitment, the call by the preacher for greater commitment seldom comes in a clear and concise message.[7] Believers remain at a low level of commitment without ever being challenged. Jerry White asks the question:

> But aren't some commitments just emotions with no substance? Yes: The Church is filled with people who make verbal or emotional commitments and never do anything about them. They respond quickly in an emotional rush and forget them almost as quickly. Such is a mockery of true spiritual decisions. Like seed sown in shallow soil, emotional commitments quickly sprout but are just as quickly withered by the sun.[8]

Bill Hull describes this low level of commitment as entry-level commitment which is shallow at first. Hull adds, "Whether or not we say that it is not our goal to leave people at the wading-pool level, very few will leave it unless we design a system that

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[6] Romans 1:16.

[7] Luke 14:25-26 records Jesus not just extending an invitation to the Messiah's Banquet, He calls for total commitment. Similarly, biblical preachers must invite believers to greater commitment.

[8] White, *Commitment*, 38.

challenges them and establishes intentional progress."[9] This thesis-project will attempt to design just a system that challenges believers to move to greater levels of commitment.

If the axiom, "Believers are the only Bible some people will read," is true, then it is equally true that "The Preacher's voice is the only voice of the Lord some people will ever hear." Preachers must use their voice to challenge believers through the faithful preaching of God's Word. With a holy boldness, the preacher must proclaim that total commitment is the demand of Jesus and is contained in the brand "Christian" which means "to be like Christ." The Preacher's voice can be the voice of love and compassion or wrath and judgment. The Preacher's voice can rebuke, correct, reprove, and exhort with the authority the Lord has invested in the Word of God that the preacher expounds. This voice God ordained to challenge men and women to greater commitment. Is biblical commitment possible in this modern age? Where do preachers find a systematic approach to preaching for greater commitment? There are books on effective expository preaching, preaching forms and preaching delivery but what about preaching books about challenging believers to greater levels of commitment?

Defining Commitment can be difficult in a postmodern context. To define biblical commitment is even more difficult. Webster's Dictionary defines the noun "commitment" as the state or an instance of being obligated or emotionally impelled.[10] Also, the verb to commit gives this definition, "to put into charge or trust: entrust and to obligate or pledge oneself." These definitions seem anemic when speaking of the commitment every believer should have in their relationship with Christ. Biblically

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[9] B. Hull, *Building*, 25.
[10] Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary Tenth Edition, s.v. "Commitment."

speaking, commitment means to express gratitude to Christ for His saving work, contained in such words as devotion, faithfulness, and dedication.

If we agree commitment means entrusting something to someone, then for purpose of this thesis-project, biblical commitment means to entrust our whole being to God. Jerry White tells us, "Although the term commitment is not a concise biblical doctrine such as faith, justification, grace or sin. Rather, it is a summary word embodying several concepts of the Christian life."[11] When believers are moving to greater levels of commitment then one might expect the following actions: submitting to baptism, willingness to attend a new members orientation class, personal and community prayer involvement, studying the scriptures and attending midweek Bible study, giving their time, talents, and treasures and ultimately preparing themselves to disciple others. We will explore this further in chapter three.

It is the goal of this thesis-project to encourage the commitment of God's preachers to preach God's Word faithfully, so that they may rekindle the spirit of commitment of God's people to God's Word. F. D. Lueking explains, "Individuals change and grow as the Word does its work… The aim of preaching is to proclaim the redeeming work of God through His Son to the end that growth in Christ-likeness takes place."[12] The Apostle Paul encourages preachers not to "…lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary."[13] Bill Hull says, "High Commitment is to be preached as the norm to all believers even though it may be practiced by but a few."[14]

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[11] White, *Commitment*, 18.
[12] F. D. Lueking, *Preaching: the Art of Connecting God and People* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 101.
[13] Galatians 6:9.
[14] B. Hull, *Building*, 131.

In the second chapter I will set forth the theological and biblical foundations of the Christian call for commitment and the role of preachers to challenge believers to develop in their commitment to Christ and His Church through the faithful preaching of God's Word. I will explore the expectation of Scripture that believers mature and grow in knowledge and in commitment to Christ. The main objective in chapter two is to explore what the Bible teaches about preaching and especially preaching that challenges the commitment of believers.

In the third chapter, I will explore how contemporary scholars address the subjects of biblical preaching, commitment, spiritual disciplines, and identifying believers' commitment levels. The goal for chapter three is to determine the best option available to reach our intended outcome of highly committed believers through the preaching event.

In chapter four, I will present the content of a workshop I designed as the end product of this thesis-project. The target audience will consist of veteran and novice preachers who do not have formal education in preaching. However, they acknowledge the need for expository preaching in order to challenge believers to greater levels of commitment. The workshop is designed to prepare preachers to present the need for greater commitment from their listeners and instruct them in how to live at those higher levels of commitment.

The final chapter will present my conclusions and recommendations. Although this project was designed for an African-American congregation it can be adjusted to fit any pastor who is interested in increasing the level of commitment among their members.

The goal is to present the importance of developing a systematic approach to moving believers to greater commitment through the preaching event and also encourage

preachers to make deliberate attempts to challenge their hearers' hearts, minds, and souls toward greater levels of commitment. It is to present the challenge of Jesus Christ to those who call Him Lord to rise to greater levels of commitment and realize the preacher's voice may be the only voice of the Lord some people will ever hear.

CHAPTER 2. THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

An old story describes the difference between commitment and involvement. There was a farmer who had a chicken and a pig. One day the chicken said to the pig, "The farmer has been good to us; we should do something for him." To which the pig asked, "What did you have in mind?" The chicken paused for a moment and then suggested, "What about preparing him a fancy breakfast of ham and eggs?" The pig thought about it then answered, "That only requires involvement from you but it requires commitment from me." Many believers can identify with the pig's dilemma, they see the demands of following Jesus Christ in terms of sacrifice and are only willing to be involved but not committed. It is the preacher's responsibility, speaking as the voice of the Lord, to challenge believers to demonstrate the type and level of commitment called for by Jesus.

In this chapter we will address the question, "What is preaching?" We will examine commitment to Jesus Christ as demonstrated in three specific disciplines: Studying, based on Matthew 11:29, Serving, based on John 13:14 and Giving, based on Luke 6:38.

What is preaching? Preaching is the most public of pastoral acts. The quality and depth of Christian commitment in a congregation depend heavily upon the quality and depth of Christian preaching. For that reason, homiletics (from *homileo*, "to speak, converse, address someone") a distinguishable area of study in theology has developed. Homiletics studies the process and act of listening to the Spirit speak through Scripture so as to engender an appropriate contemporary witness to God. In the Old Testament the words used to describe the homiletical practices are "preacher" (קהלת *qōheleth*), "to bring

or tell good news" (בשר *bāśar)*, and "to call" or "proclaim" (קרא *qārā'*). In the New Testament, Jude describes Enoch, the seventh from Adam as one who prophesied.[1] Peter identifies Noah as a "preacher of righteousness."[2] The book of Deuteronomy contains a series of sermons by Moses.

The writing prophets of the Old Testament are well known. Concerning the writing prophets, the *Evangelical Dictionary* informs us, "they are divided into the four major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) and the twelve minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), according to the length of their writings."[3] In the days of judges, Samuel was a prophetic voice. In the days of the kings, Nathan was a prophetic voice. And after the separation of the ten tribes, Elijah and Elisha were the prophetic voices that called God's people back to commitment to the covenant.

Preaching in the New Testament (κηρύσσω or *kērysso*) has been defined as the proclamation of the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord.[4] A preacher is a person who has the inner call from God through the Holy Spirit and the external call from the Church. The preacher is called, "to speak as a personal witness (μάρτυς *martys*) to God's revelation, interpreting it, explaining it and applying it to the needs of the people."[5]

Expository preaching is the form of preaching that attempts to develop the meaning of a particular passage of scripture to be incorporated into a message to be delivered to the modern audience. Andrew W. Blackwood, Sr., gave two worthy definitions:

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[1] Jude 1:14.
[2] 2 Peter 2:5.
[3] Walter A. Elwell, Ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 886.
[4] Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1983), 127.
[5] Elwell, *Evangelical,* 868.

"Preaching is divine truth voiced by a chosen personality to meet human need," and "Preaching means interpreting life today with light from the Scripture so as to meet the needs of the hearer now, and guide the hearer in doing God's will tomorrow."[6] Therefore, preaching is proclaiming God's Word through God's preacher with the purpose of challenging God's people to commitment to Jesus Christ.

Theological themes regarding the preacher's role in challenging the commitment of believers are found in the works of Karl Barth, John Calvin and others as well as the National Primitive Baptist Convention of the United States of America, Inc.'s (Primitive Baptist) *Discipline of the Primitive Baptist Church (The Discipline).* Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian, argued preaching to be the reason for doing theology, once explained that "preachers cannot think enough about the people to whom they are preaching."[7] Barth acknowledges that God may use preachers to express to the people of God what God expects of them. He writes, "When God gives Himself to us to be known in the truth of His self-knowledge as the triune God, He permits some one of His creatures or a happening in the sphere and time of the world created by him to speak for Him."[8]

Simply stated, Barth agrees that the Lord speaks through the preacher's voice. Karl Barth answers the question of the relationship between the preacher's voice and the Word of God by offering this two-part definition of preaching:

> First, preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks, claiming for the purpose the exposition of a biblical text in free human words that are relevant to contemporaries by those who are called to do this in the church that is obedient to its commission. Secondly, preaching is the attempt enjoined upon the church to serve God's own Word, through one who is

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[6] Elwell, *Evangelical*, 868.

[7] Karl Barth, *Word of God and Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), 108.

[8] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, volume II part I. trans. T.H.L. Parker, et al Ed, G. W. Bromiley, et al (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 53.

> called thereto, by expounding a biblical text in human words and making it relevant to contemporaries in intimation of what they have to hear from God himself.[9]

Barth's two-part definition looks at preaching from the perspectives of God and humanity. Barth, however, did not see these two as equal, but insisted that the preacher must be faithful both to the text and to life, but "it is always better to keep close to the text"[10] if a choice has to be made. Preaching then is revealing, during the communication of God's Word, God's Will as expressed to God's people, challenging their commitment.

John Calvin says in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that, "Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."[11] When commenting on Paul's writing in Ephesians 4:10-13, John Calvin, known for this insistence upon *Sola Scriptura*, the idea that all Christian teachings should be based only on the Scripture and not on Church traditions, shares, "We see how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the church. We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors."[12]

Calvin would agree that the preacher's voice may be the only voice of the Lord that some people will ever hear, but I believe Calvin would add that the preacher's voice is a common method whereby God speaks to His people because he says, "he *(God)* proves our obedience by a very good test when we hear his ministers speaking just as if he

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[9] Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Daniel E. Daniels (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 44.
[10] Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, trans. B. E. Hooke (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1963), 77.
[11] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume. 1, ed. by John T. McNeil, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 35.
[12] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume.2 (XXI), ed. by John T. McNeil, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 1016-1017.

himself spoke."[13] Calvin states elsewhere "The task of preaching must therefore be undertaken, and the word of the preacher should be heard, in the expectancy that Christ the Mediator will come and give His presence where the Gospel is preached, and cause men to hear His voice through the voice of the minister."[14] Finally, Calvin adds that what the apostles performed for the whole world, each pastor ought to perform for their flock.

The Articles of Faith for the Primitive Baptist Convention, Article II reads: "WE BELIEVE the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice."[15] The Primitive Baptist Convention puts emphasis on the whole Bible and it is through the faithful preaching of both the Old and New Testaments that people's lives are challenged and growth is possible. Pastors are called by God and the church with the expectation that they will share a biblical message.

The Discipline defines the duty of the pastor to the church: "he must be acquainted with the flock—intimately acquainted with the young and old, the feeble and the strong, the sick and the well, or he will not know what kind of food to administer, whether milk or strong meat."[16] Knowing both God's Word and God's people is essential in fulfilling the duty as a pastor. Ashcraft agrees, "The reading and proclamation of God's Word must remain a vital part of worship. It is through the Word that God calls sinners to repentance and saints to spiritual growth, commitment and service."[17] Whenever preaching the Word of God appears unfruitful and unproductive, preachers are encouraged by the promise in Isaiah 55:10-11:

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[13] Calvin, *Institutes,* 1018.
[14] Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), 83.
[15] National Primitive Baptist Convention of the United States of America, Inc., *Discipline of the Primitive Baptist Church*, Fifth Revised Ed. August, 2003, 2.
[16] Primitive, *Discipline,* 21.
[17] Morris Ashcraft, *Christian Faith and Beliefs* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1984), 289.

> For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.[18]

The Discipline reminds us that the preacher's task does not include creating a new word, but to preach God's Word, faithfully, clearly and consistently if saints are to grow in their commitment to Jesus Christ.

Other theologians commenting on preaching include the North African preacher, St. Augustine, who said, "Many people are transformed in the sense of knowing what they did not know before or believing what had once seemed incredible to them, and not in the sense of doing something which they had known to be necessary but refused to do."[19] For Augustine, audience awareness was a vital concern in preaching and a key to challenging their commitment. Also, Martin Luther elevated preaching as an indispensable means of grace, seeing it as central to the church liturgy. The Word of God is made alive in the present through the words of the preacher. "Here we also see the power of this preaching of the Gospel," Luther wrote. "Beyond all the might and the power of the world and of all creatures, Christ proves His ability to draw the hearts of men to Himself through the Word alone..."[20] Paul Tillich, in a sermon entitled *Is There Any Word from the Lord?* based on Jeremiah 37:17 raised the question, "How can we get such a word that is spoken now and is spoken to us?" Tillich quickly answers:

> There is only one answer: By keeping ourselves open when it comes to us! This is not easy. We try to resist it, and if it is too strong for us we try to falsify it. We may be in a situation out of which we cannot extricate

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[18] Isaiah 55:10-11.
[19] St. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, translator R. P. H. Green (New York: Oxford, 1997), 132.
[20] *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. Jarislav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1955 ff.), volume 13, 291.

> ourselves. It is too late for this. So the word from the Lord comes as a word of judgment and we cannot take it. Or the word which comes to us requests a radical change in our ways of life and thought. But this we cannot achieve, and we back into our habits of good and evil, of right and wrong. Or we are in doubt and guilt and despair, and the word comes to us and tells us that we can say yes to ourselves because an eternal yes has been said to us and of us.[21]

Tillich makes the point that "the Word of the Lord" that challenges us is not always easy to receive, but believers should keep their ears and heart open, because there is a word for us today, that comes to us, and believers must be open to receive that word. St. Augustine, Martin Luther and Paul Tillich were sensitive to the needs of their hearers and the modern preacher should exhibit the same sensitivity. In fact the great theologians all agree that biblical preaching in accordance with the Word of God should be one human challenging other humans using the Word of God.

Old Testament preaching challenged the commitment of the people of God in the first prophetic period in Israel's history, from the time of Samuel to that of Jeremiah. During that period appeared Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Elijah, Elisha, Joel, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. These preachers came to people and kings with their messages from God, often with the expression, "Thus saith the Lord." They pleaded, warned, rebuked, encouraged and challenge the lack of commitment of God's people. When the commitment of God's people became apathetic, God would raise up new prophets. The last period of "Hebrew prophecy extended from Ezekiel and Daniel to Malachi, from the Exile to the restoration and later."[22] The character and influence of prophecy did not change,

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[21] Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1955), 123.
[22] Elwell, *Evangelical*, 868.

but it was still the voice of God through chosen individuals to God's chosen people, speaking both to the present and pointing to the future.

Prior to the prophets, Moses delivered the first Covenant between God and Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai. Here Moses received a special revelation from God, requiring a commitment from the people, acknowledging gratitude of God's deliverance from Egypt and a willingness to make a fresh pledge of loyalty. Exodus 19:3-8 records this Covenant proposal by God and the response of the Israelites. Moses was told:

> 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.[23]

Clearly, Moses' voice was the voice of the Lord.

All of the promises of God could only be fulfilled if Israel would obey God's Word. The Hebrew word for "obey" (שָׁמַע shä·mah') seems to carry pregnantly within it all these meanings – hearing, listening, heeding, trusting, acting according to what we hear and believe.[24] This conditional statement tells the hearers that apart from knowing and doing God's Word, God's destiny for the nation would never be accomplished. This renewal of the covenant preceded the law itself. The covenant God was making with Israel involved commitment on the part of the Israelites. Exodus 19:8 records their united response, "All the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do!'"[25] Moses, speaking on behalf of God as the voice of the Lord that the people hear, challenged the Israelites' commitment and they responded positively.

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[23] Exodus 19:5-6.
[24] Ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary Volume 1 Genesis Exodus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 114.
[25] Exodus 19:8.

Years later, Joshua challenged the children of Israel to choose commitment to the living God as opposed to the idols and foreign gods of the nations around them. Joshua challenged the people of God to decide for or against total commitment to God:

> Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.[26]

The Tyndale Commentary helps us to understand:

> The 'service' (Hebrew עָבַד 'abad) of the Lord is repeated seven times. Three times it refers to the present generation of Israel. Twice Joshua commands them to serve the God of Israel; twice he challenges Israel to choose whom they will serve; twice he refers to 'the gods your forefathers worshipped (served) beyond the river as in verse 2' Joshua concludes with a commitment of himself and his household.[27]

The New International Biblical Commentary describes this scene:

> The reported speech switches from the first person message of God to an indirect warning from Joshua (24: l4—15). The challenge begins with a call to fear and serve the Lord with all faithfulness. Both "fear" and "serve" describe faithful worship. Joshua continues to call the people to put aside the gods of their ancestors to serve the Lord. The idolatry of the past continues into the present. Now is the time to choose personally, this day, the God of the present. Each generation must make this choice. Commitment to the living God is always one generation away from dying out.[28]

The people dialogued with Joshua in response to this challenge. The commentary continues to stress the commitment of Joshua and the people.

> Key verses of commitment appear at the end of each speech. Joshua says, As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (24:15). The

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[26] Joshua 24:14-15.

[27] Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. D. J. Wiseman, *Joshua: an Introduction and Commentary*. Richard S. Hess. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 305.

[28] J. Harris, C. Brown and M. Moore, *New International Biblical Commentary, Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 116-117.

> people respond to Joshua out of gratitude for God's blessings: We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God (24:18). Joshua warns them: You are not able to serve the LORD (24:19). God has high standards of faithfulness because the Lord is a holy God, jealous [uncompromising], will not forgive [repeatedly] your rebellion and your sins. Joshua also reminds the people that God punishes with the same intensity that God does good. Serving God is dangerous unless the people are determined to do good as God does. The people remain determined and reply, No! We will serve the LORD (24:21). The dialogue effectively brings the level of commitment needed to establish a relationship with God.[29]

Finally, the oath of service made by the people becomes a witness to this renewed commitment to God.

The people accepted the challenge of Joshua's words but Joshua challenged them to demonstrate their commitment by their actions.

> Joshua then challenges them to demonstrate that they mean what they say by throwing away their idols and yielding their hearts [wills] to the LORD. Their testimony demands negative and positive acts of devotion to the God of Israel. So the people say again to Joshua, We will serve the LORD our God and obey him (24:24). Challenging the ability of the people to do what they say they will do is a marvelous method of getting true commitment from them. In the end, the people commit themselves to worship and obey their God. That is the ultimate witness to a vow.[30]

This commitment process continued until Joshua cut a covenant with the people writing down their responsibilities to the demands of God contained in the Law of Moses.

> He did three things to formalize the agreement. He wrote the covenant in the Book of the Law of God and set up a large stone under a sacred oak tree, near the holy place of the Lord. Then he turned to the people and declared, See! This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God (24:27). An impartial witness now stands to remind all of their agreement with God. A book containing the responsibilities of the covenant can be read at any time to testify against violations of this agreement. People may rationalize their behavior, but these witnesses cannot be changed. They will verify whether the people live up to their

[29] Harris, *New International*, 116.
[30] Harris, *New International*, 117.

> commitments or not and thereby dispense blessings or curses, rewards or punishment.[31]

As the commentary writer notes, each generation must make the same decision of commitment, and this commitment ceremony is replayed in the ministry of Elijah and King Josiah.

On Mount Carmel, Elijah challenged Israel again to make a commitment, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."[32] But this time the people said nothing. Their hearts were divided, whereas God will have all or none.[33]

> The challenge 'How long will you go limping (waver) between two opinions?' can be interpreted also as hobbling between two forks (denoting tree branches or cross-roads or even crutches). This is the English idiom to 'sit on the fence' (so NEB). The clear choice is between acknowledgement of the LORD (Yahweh) or Baal.[34]

The prophet used his authority to challenge the people's commitment to God over Baal.

The story of King Josiah's spiritual revival is recorded in 2 Kings 22. King Josiah ordered the repairs of the temple. The Book of the Law was found and sparked a spiritual revival. King Josiah stood before the people and publicly declared his commitment to obey the Word of God. "The people stood in affirmation; their commitment was unanimous."[35] They responded to King Josiah spontaneously as they followed the king's example and leadership. It was clearly the work of God among the people, but God worked through the leadership of King Josiah to bring about a greater level of commitment among the people.

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[31] Harris, *New International*, 117.
[32] 1 Kings 18:21.
[33] Matthew Henry's Commentary On the Whole, *Volume 2 Joshua to Esther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 525.
[34] D. J. Wiseman, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: 1 & 2 Kings* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 167.
[35] 2 Kings 23:3 (The Message).

> The ceremony compares with the basic Mizpah covenant (1 Samuel 8:11-17, 10:25) and the renewal covenant at Shechem (Joshua 24), both of which marked turning points in Jewish history. The participants (v.2) included those of every status (2 Chronicles 34:30 later substitutes 'Levites' for prophets). All are essential for total commitment, with Josiah, to follow the Lord as he takes the lead in the tradition of Moses (Dt 1:3, Ex 24:3-8), Joshua (8:34; 24) and Samuel (1 Samuel 7:6; 12:18-25), followed later by Ezra (Nehemiah 8:2).[36]

Both through the prophet's proclamation of the Word and the written Word itself, the Word of God challenged the people to examine their current lack of commitment while commanding total commitment to *Yahweh.*

Years later, after the exiles had returned and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, another spiritual revival upon the reading of God's Word. In Nehemiah 8, all the people assembled to hear Ezra the priest read the Law to them. A high wooden platform was built for the occasion and others stood on his right and his left and when Ezra opened the book, all the people stood up with him. Verses eight and nine reads:

> They read from the book, from of the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.[37]

It was important for the people to hear the reading of the Word of God, but also there were special individuals appointed to help the people understand. The Communicator's Commentary gives this insight into the passage:

> Throughout this chapter, the understanding of God's Law is highlighted. For example, those gathered included "all who could hear with understanding' (v.2); the Levites "helped the people to understand the Law" (v. 8); and once they did understand, they threw a great party to celebrate that "they understood the words that were declared to them" (v.

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[36] D. J. Wiseman, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: 1 & 2 Kings* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 299.

[37] Nehemiah 8:8-9.

> 12). Ezra and the other leaders were not satisfied simply to read the Law and leave the people to make of it what they would. No, they labored not only to declare God's truth but to make sure people understood it.[38]

The Communicator's Commentary brings understanding for this passage, and it issues a challenge to those who communicate God's Word in the modern context by raising several questions:

> What an example for those of us who communicate God's truth today! We who teach and preach would profit from taking this example to heart. In the abstract, most of us would like our listeners (worship participants, Bible-study members, Sunday school students, etc.) to understand what we communicate. But how seriously do we take this goal? Do we ever verify that the listeners have understood what we have taught or preached? Can we assume that if we present truth in an interesting and compelling manner, understanding will naturally follow? Undoubtedly, such an assumption would regularly prove to be false.[39]

If the people of God are to grow, preachers should be reminded that the people need to understand God's Word in order to apply it to their lives. The preacher must communicate the sense of the passage of Scripture to their modern audience.

Malachi, is separated from the book of Matthew by a silent period of more than four hundred years, and yet, these two books are connected. Historically, during the time between the appearance of these two books there was a long time when no biblical record of a voice speaking for God, no prophet came to Israel, no scriptures were written and no encouragement from God was forthcoming; the heavens were silent. The prophecy of Malachi, however, says "'Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,' says the

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[38] Mark D. Roberts, *The Communicator's Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther Vol. 11* (Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 241.
[39] Roberts, *Communicator*, 241.

LORD of hosts."[40] The Old Testament ends with the threat of a curse, but also with the expectation of a new blessing, setting the stage for the New Testament.

The New Testament begins with Matthew's record of the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy: John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus, "preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the LORD, make His paths straight!'"[41] John the Baptist walked in his calling and prepared the people for the coming of Christ by challenging them to commit to the Kingdom of God. Matthew connects John's preaching ministry with Jesus' preaching ministry by simply stating, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee. From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"[42] Matthew records that after Jesus began to preach, He called Peter and Andrew to the process of discipleship with the words, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."[43] We see in the gospels Jesus calling individuals as well as challenging a crowd of people who were following Him to Jerusalem. In the crowd were a variety of people, they had various occupations, and they were of different degrees of social status. Some were ill, while some were hungry. And, He challenges them, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but

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[40] Malachi 3:1.
[41] Matthew 3:1-3.
[42] Matthew 4:12, 17.
[43] Matthew 4:19.

whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."[44] The Pulpit Commentary gives this explanation:

> The Greek word here rendered "life" (ψυχή psychē) signifies the natural animal life. If a man grasp at this shadowy, quick passing earthly life, he will assuredly lose the substantial enduring heavenly-life.[45]

The preaching ministry of Jesus was characterized by challenging individuals and crowds to make a commitment to the kingdom of heaven, also, giving them a process for growth in that commitment. The New Interpreter's Bible offers this explanation:

> Luke emphasizes not readiness to die with Jesus in the hour of persecution, but rather that discipleship requires a continuing daily yielding of one's life to the call to follow Jesus. The saying may have had special relevance to Christians facing persecution, but its truth penetrates to the nature of life itself. In the polarity of spending one's life in the pursuits to which Jesus would direct the disciple or indulging only one's own ambitions and interests, true fulfillment is to be found paradoxically, in the giving up of one's life. [46]

Crucial to Jesus' ministry was the proclamation of the coming age of the kingdom of God. The connection of the Kingdom message continues from Jesus to the sending out of the disciples with the direction "as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand."[47] In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gives His mission statement by quoting Isaiah 61:1-2 "the spirit of the LORD is upon me, because He anointed me to *preach* the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to *proclaim* release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to *proclaim* the favorable year of the

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[44] Luke 9:23-24 New King James Version (NKJV).
[45] Ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary Volume XVI Mark Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 237.
[46] R. Alan Culpepper, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume IX Luke John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 202.
[47] Matthew 10:7.

LORD."[48] Jesus preaches for a high level of commitment in a variety of settings: on the Mount, on the plain, from a boat, near the temple, in the marketplace.

This level of commitment, however, involves a cost as on one occasion Jesus preached:

> If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?
>
> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.[49]

When Jesus says, "hate" He expresses a Semitic hyperbole that exaggerates a contrast so that the comparison can be seen more clearly. Robert H. Stein comes to our aid in his book, *Difficult Passages in the New Testament: Interpreting Puzzling Texts in the Gospels & Epistles* where he explains this declaration "is not a literal statement but an exaggerated one."[50] Stein goes on to say, "Jesus is exaggerating for effect."[51] By comparing this statement with the similar saying found in Matthew 10:37, "He who loves

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[48] Luke 4:18-19.
[49] Luke 14:26-35.
[50] Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Passages in the New Testament: Interpreting Puzzling Texts in the Gospels and Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 155.
[51] Stein, *Difficult*, 163.

father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."[52] Stein concludes:

> Through the form of the saying in Matthew, we are able to see that Jesus original command to hate one's family was not meant to be taken literally but was an exaggeration used for effect. "Hate" is simply an idiomatic way of saying "love less."[53]

Luke's harsh wording, however, records Jesus using strong language to express the comparative nature of commitment to Christ and that of natural human commitments. The *Westminster Bible Companion* provides this insight into Luke 14:26-35:

> They include three sayings about criteria that prevent people from being Jesus' disciples (14:26, 27, 33), amplified by short parables (14:28-30, 31-32, 34-35a). The first requirement (14:26) – "hating" father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even one's own life – does not prescribe the emotion we know as "hatred," or in the case of one's own life, self hatred or contempt. Rather, it means even being willing to live without these loved ones, not being so attached to them that their well-being, or even one's own survival, is one's first priority. The saying is powerful precisely because one's own life and family relationships are a baseline of one's personal security and identity, regardless of one's social position.[54]

The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament gives this explanation between coming "to" Jesus and following "after" Jesus:

> To come "to" Jesus stresses entering into relationship, while coming "after" Jesus refers to the pursuit of that relationship. But discipleship involves both a start and a journey, so the two ideas are intertwined. Faith, since it is trust in another, it is essentially an entry into relational discipleship. Faith does not stop with decision; it commences. As with any relationship, faith is an ongoing affair. Beyond the decision comes the expression in action.[55]

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[52] Matthew 10:37.
[53] Stein, *Difficult*, 172.
[54] Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke 13:10-15:32: Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 201.
[55] Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:23: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 1284.

Also, The New Interpreter's Bible explains that Jesus wanted to express clearly the cost of commitment and the price of discipleship in this passage:

> The conclusion to Luke 14:1-35 now contemplates the danger that many would-be disciples will fail to meet the conditions for true discipleship. Rather than trying to lure the unsuspecting into unconsidered commitments, Jesus warns the crowd in advance that the way of discipleship will not be easy.[56]

Jesus includes two parables to provide support for the challenge of commitment in verses 26-27. The parables illustrate Luke's view of how this commitment will be demonstrated in the ongoing life of the believers: all wise people, before they definitely commit themselves to any policy carefully should consider whether they can carry it through.[57]

The preaching ministry of Jesus was characterized by challenging the commitment level of His followers who heard Him. His healing ministry verified His power over sickness and demons, His preaching ministry revealed the demands of commitment. The Gospel of Luke ends with Jesus saying:

> Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." You are witnesses of these things And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.[58]

And again in Acts 1:8, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."[59] There is the transfer of responsibility for proclaiming the message of the kingdom to the disciples, but also there is the transfer of

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[56] *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume IX Luke John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 292.
[57] Ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary Volume XVI Mark Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 395.
[58] Luke 24:46-49.
[59] Acts 1:8.

power to enable them for this enormous task. Roger Stronstad says in his book, *The Prophethood of All Believers:*

> Based on the paradigm of Jesus' own anointing with the Spirit this Spirit baptism which the disciples will experience is their 'anointing' for ministry, not only consecrating them for their task as witnesses (Luke 24.48; Acts 1:8), but also inaugurating that very witness. In both Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8 there is the promise of power for the disciples' vocation of being witnesses.[60]

The word Luke uses for "power" in both Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8 is δύναμις which denotes a "robust force at work in demonstrative ways for all to see and feel."[61] Like the apostles, the preacher today is summoned and empowered by Jesus to be a witness μάρτυς and to challenge believers to make a greater commitment to the "Way" of life established by Jesus Christ.

Throughout the book of Acts we encounter the apostles preaching. Philip preached in Samaria. Saul (Paul) preached in Damascus. Peter preached in Caesarea saying, "He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."[62] Paul preached everywhere he went: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Ephesus. From Corinth, Paul wrote to the church at Rome:

> So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

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[60] Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 64.
[61] Robert W. Wall, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume X: Acts, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Romans, 1 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), 123.
[62] Acts 10:42-43.

> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the Righteous man shall live by faith."[63]

In Acts, preaching is shown as a divine and a human act. It is important for both the preacher and those who hear him to remember that the preacher is human. When Peter was met by Cornelius who fell at his feet and worshiped him, Peter refused the worship by saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man."[64] Paul's confession to the Lyconians must be the confession of all preachers, "We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, Who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them."[65] Throughout the Bible it has been God's preaching plan that one human challenge other humans using God's Word.

This understanding of the divine and human nature of preaching continues through the epistles. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not form ourselves."[66] It is by God's power through the preacher's experience and expertise that God's amazing power is demonstrated. Paul illustrated to the Corinthians how God and the preacher work together to bring about change in people. When the Corinthians were divided over different ministries Paul wrote "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."[67]

> After declaring to the Corinthians that they were carnal in their estimates of God's ministers, the apostle exposes their folly in this particular, by

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[63] Romans 1:15-17.
[64] Acts 10: 26.
[65] Acts 14:15.
[66] 2 Corinthians 4:7.
[67] 1 Corinthians 3:6-7.

> assuring them that he and Apollos were but ministers, or servants, whom God had commissioned to labor in their behalf. .....St. Paul's figures are not poetic, but practical, and his imagination is always the offspring of the reason; and hence the illustrative image – "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" – began and ended in a breath, with no delight in it beyond utility. Two conclusions follow: one, the entire dependence upon God for the increase; and the other, the co-working with him who is the only source of the increase. Neither the sower nor the seed, however good, can secure the yield' this is from the great Husbandman, who apportions the result according to his sovereignty, and under conditions which St. Paul subsequently points out.[68]

Paul was especially aware of the need for continual growth in the area of commitment, but he also was wise enough to recognize that everyone is not ready for deep profound truths. When writing to the Corinthians he describes them as babes in Christ. He said that he had to teach the basics of the Christian faith, even though they had an inflated view of their spirituality. They believed they were ready for the "deeper things," but were not living at an appropriately deep level in their commitment. He says, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able."[69] The difference Paul is making between spiritual milk and spiritual solid food is one of level, not type. Every doctrine that can be taught in seminary can be taught to children, though not in the same words. In that same chapter, Paul explains that although preachers sow the Word of God into the hearts and minds of people, and others provide nourishment to that planted Word, it is ultimately God who makes the Word grow in our hearts and minds. Preachers must be mindful that, "First and foremost, preaching is rooted in the divine."[70] Preachers work with God, and

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[68] Ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary Volume XIX Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 101.
[69] 1 Corinthians 3:2.
[70] Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1999), 18.

challenge people to grow in their commitment to God through the faithful preaching of God's Word.

The preacher's role to challenge believers to move to greater levels of commitment to Jesus Christ can be summed up in the charge given by the apostle Paul to Timothy, "Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."[71] J. Vernon McGee says, "'Preach the Word' means to proclaim the Word, to give it out, to herald it. This phrase is sort of a rallying cry, a motto that people respond to."[72]

Some believers come to Church with the expectation that they will receive a word from the Lord. Their question is the same question Zedekiah asked of Jeremiah, "is there a word from the Lord?"[73] In the midst of all that might happen within a Christian worship service (singing, praying, testimonials) people gather with their burdens to hear the Lord say something and to receive a word from the Lord. Like Timothy, the modern proclaimers of the gospel message already have the Word of the Lord to give them. The preacher must be the voice of the Lord the people hear.

Paul charged Timothy to preach the Word in order to challenge believers to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Paul gives Timothy, and all preachers, the assurance that the Holy Scripture is advantageous in this endeavor by stating that:

> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.[74]

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[71] 2 Timothy 4:2.
[72] J. Vernon McGee, *The Epistles: First & Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon Vol. 50* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1991), 128.
[73] Jeremiah 37:17.
[74] 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Thomas Oden states, "Preaching declares this good news, inviting persons to Christ (its evangelical dimension). It also seeks to comfort, encourage, and inspire devotion, dedication, loyalty, and discipleship to Christ (its pastoral dimension)."[75] Paul's emphasis on the Word of God is persistent.

As a pastor, Timothy was not required to merely know the Word or defend the Word; he was charged to preach the Word. The Word is to be the content of the message. Timothy needed to keep focused on the Word of God because fallen humanity, by nature, does not want God's revelation. They with "itching ears"[76] would rather hear what they want to hear from individuals who would be willing to say what pleases them. If believers want to hear God's Word and preachers preach God's Word, God will do something wonderful, changing our heart in wonderful ways, and giving us a desire for His Word

This concept of growth, maturity and the responsibility of preachers is echoed in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians:

> And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.[77]

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[75] Oden, *Pastoral*, 128.
[76] 2 Timothy 4:3 (NKJV).
[77] Ephesians 4:11-16.

Calvin's comment on this passage bears repeating:

> We see how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the church. We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors.[78]

The way the apostle describes God's method of developing believers is through those who shepherd the flock of God by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God.

> The members of the Church grow by feeding on the Word and ministering to each other. The first evidence of spiritual growth is Christlikeness. The second evidence is stability. The maturing Christian is not tossed about by every religious novelty that comes along. The third evidence of maturity is truth joined with love. "Speaking the truth in love" (4:15). It has well been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy. The last evidence of maturity is cooperation (v. 16). The Body grows as the individual members grow, and they grow as they feed on the Word and minister to each other.[79]

Paul was concerned about the Ephesians' growth in commitment and set forth a process for continual growth.

Peter also realized that believers gather together with a need, "like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk."[80] Upon hearing the Scripture read or a biblical sermon focusing on their lives believers are presented with the opportunity "grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."[81] They need a spiritual word that will challenge them to greater levels of commitment but also comfort them in the midst of their daily struggle.

> There is something on which the Christian must set his heart. He must yearn for the unadulterated (unmixed, pure, sincere) word (λογικός logikos). It is the word of God which is in his mind; and we think that what Peter means here is that the Christian must desire with his whole

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[78] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1016-1017.
[79] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Gaining the Things that Money Can't Buy. A New Testament Study – Ephesians* (Colorado Springs, CO: ChariotVictor Publishing, 1979), 103-104.
[80] 1 Peter 2:2.
[81] 1 Peter 2:3.

> heart the nourishment which comes from the word of God, for by that nourishment he can thrive and grow up until he reaches salvation itself.[82]

Good expository preaching helps the people develop an appetite for the Word which will yield spiritual growth as well as growth in other commitments. Peter ends his epistle with these words, "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."[83] The Pulpit Commentary explains, "Growth is necessary for steadfastness; we cannot persevere unless we continually advance in faith."[84] It continues to say, "The Apostle Peter here instructs us that it is required of Christians that they not only continue in grace, but grow in grace."[85] Finally, we are informed that:

> A tree is not a complete reality at once, but from a beginning there is progress toward an end. So we are not complete beings at once; but from a beginning there is a progress intended for us toward the end of our being. We are to grow especially in that in which we find ourselves to be deficient. We are further exhorted to grow in "the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This is in keeping with the great importance which is attached to knowledge in this Epistle.[86]

The apostles understood that believers should grow in their commitment to God as their knowledge grows concerning Christ and His Church. The modern preacher has no less of a responsibility to preach for growth and expect growth. There is clearly a biblical basis for preaching for growth to greater levels of commitment, and there is clear scripture evidence that God desires His people to not only make a commitment to Christ and His Church, but to also grow in that commitment.

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[82] William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 226-227.
[83] 2 Peter 3:18.
[84] Ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary Volume XXII Peter, I-III John, Jude, Revelation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 71.
[85] Spence, *Pulpit*, 81.
[86] Spence, *Pulpit*, 91.

Examining the life of Peter and Paul, one discovers that although each apostle grew at a different rate each reached a greater level of commitment to Jesus. Through visions and various challenges, they each grew to the level of commitment where they were willing to give their lives for Christ and His Church. Peter enjoyed the ministry and example of Jesus and was able to hear Him personally. Paul had the witness of the other apostles, and his own personal experiences with the Lord. Nevertheless, neither remained in the condition wherein they were called, they each grew in their commitment. Paul makes clear the necessity of preaching and the preacher: "so faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."[87] And how does one hear this Word of God unless one has somebody to declare it, and "how will they hear without a preacher?"[88] McGee brings clarity, "Faith does not come by preaching philosophy or psychology or some political nostrum; it comes by preaching the Word of God."[89] Like Paul and Peter, pastors and preachers must be willing to deepen their level of commitment before challenging other believers' commitment. In essence preachers must be the voice of the Lord that some people will ever hear, because that is their charge and calling.

Throughout scripture, there is an unbroken line of individuals called by God who proclaimed God's Word, challenging the commitment in every generation. The preacher's challenge is to communicate what Paul said in Acts 20:24, "I no longer count my life as dear unto myself; I have abandoned my personal aspirations and ambitions; I have offered myself as a living sacrifice to Christ." This is the level of commitment that should be expressed and demonstrated by all believers. Challenging people to commit themselves unreservedly to Christ is difficult. That is why so many preachers have

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[87] Romans 10:17.
[88] Romans 10:14.
[89] J. Vernon McGee, *Epistles Romans Chapters 9-16 Volume 47* (Nashville, TN: Nelson 1991), 47.

settled for church attendance, membership, and low levels of giving as an acceptable measure of commitment. As preachers of the Gospel, however, we should express a greater level of expectation regarding the quality of believers produced through our preaching. We have to decide what level of commitment we expect from the people who come to hear us preach.

For purposes of this thesis-project we have identified three specific disciplines of Christian commitment in which believers should be challenged to grow, namely: Studying based on Matthew 11:29, Serving based on John 13:14 and Giving based on Luke 6:38. There are other disciplines of commitment[90] that believers should be challenged to experience, but these three were chosen because they are commanded by Jesus, demonstrated in the book of Acts and they are taught by the Apostles Peter and Paul in the epistles. These three disciplines demonstrate the commitment of believers to Christ and His Church.

Commitment Demonstrated Through Studying

Preachers who are serious about God's Word will also challenge hearers to take God's Word seriously. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus offers this invitation, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and *learn from me*, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."[91] "*Learn*[92] of me is His instruction. And to be a pupil of Jesus is to have a very gentle and humble-minded

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[90] Other disciplines of commitment are worship, fellowship, outreach, prayer, evangelism, and discipleship. More discussion will be given in Chapter 3 concerning these three disciplines and other disciplines of Christian commitment.

[91] Matthew 11:28-30. Italicized added for emphasis on learning.

[92] The word (μανθάνω) translated as "learn" is in the imperative mood, which means a command to the hearer to perform this action.

Teacher, who is never impatient with those who are slow to learn and never intolerant with those who stumble."[93] He challenged believers to be committed.

> The "yoke" vs. 29, put on animals for pulling heavy loads is a metaphor for the discipline of the discipleship. If Jesus is not offering the yoke of the law, neither is he offering freedom from all constraints. The "yoke" is Jesus' yoke, not the yoke of the law; discipleship must be to him. In view of v. 27 "learn from me" cannot mean "imitate me" or "learn from my experience" but "learn from the revelation that I alone impart."[94]

It is no coincidence that believers' commitment is demonstrated in their willingness to learn more about God' plan of salvation by studying God's Word. Jesus gathered disciples and taught multitudes about the Kingdom of God. He reminded people of the values of the kingdom and challenged them to a new meaning and a new way of living. He challenged believers to be committed. Through careful study of His life recorded in the gospels modern believers will be challenged to grow.

Also, Jesus referenced the prophecies in the Old Testament that spoke of His life. As Peter learned of Jesus, he made the great confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."[95] The more one learns from Him, the more one will love Him, because one will learn of His great love. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* gives this description of those who have a commitment to Jesus demonstrated in studying:

> The characteristic name for those who gathered around Jesus during His ministry was "disciple." He was the teacher or master; they were His disciple (μαθητής mathetes), a term involving too much personal attachment and commitment to be rendered adequately by "pupil." The name was carried over into Acts, where it frequently has the general sense of Christian (Acts 14:21). The use of the term in Acts for those who had no acquaintance with Jesus during the days of His flesh serves as a reminder that the relationship of subsequent generations of Christians to

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[93] R. V. G. Tasker, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1961), 122.
[94] *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 278.
[95] Matthew 16:16.

> the exalted Christ is not essentially different from that enjoyed by those who walked with him on the earth.[96]

Luke records that Jesus taught the disciples on the road to Emmaus, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."[97] To expound is to simply let the text speak for itself; exactly what a Bible teacher should attempt his or her best to do. The Greek word for expound (*διερμηνεύω*) has the idea of sticking close to the text, to unfold the meaning of what is said, explain. "He expounded which means He stuck close to the text as He showed through scripture His identity to the disciples."[98] The Tyndale Commentary adds, "Jesus began a systematic Bible study."[99]

Jesus said in what we call the Great Commission:

> All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.[100]

The *Pulpit Commentary* provide this insight, "The admonition in verse 19, μαθητεύω *mathēteuō* which mean "make disciples" combined with teaching expressed in verse 20, makes instruction a necessary condition of full discipleship."[101]

This concept of studying and learning is demonstrated in the early church. In Acts 2, the birth of the Church is recorded on the day of Pentecost. After a challenging

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[96] Elwell, *Evangelical*, 216.
[97] Luke 24:27 (NKJV).
[98] David Guzik, "Study Guide for Luke 24." *Enduring Word. Blue Letter Bible.* http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=7932&commInfo=31&topic=Luke&ar=Luk_24_27 accessed July 7, 2006.
[99] Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 370.
[100] Matthew 28-18-20.
[101] Ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary Volume XV Matthew* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 645.

sermon by Peter thousands became believers. Acts 2:41-42 records, "That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. *They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles*, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers."[102] They placed a high priority on the teachings of the apostles and on the Word of God. The primitive church was a studying church. The believers demonstrated their new commitment to Christ by learning from the apostles.

The believers had just made a commitment to Jesus and now they had a desire to know more. The Greek verb προσκαρτερέω translated "committed" in the Message translation means "to be strong towards, to endure in or persevere in, to be continually steadfast with a person or a thing,"[103] to be single-minded to a certain course of action. In this passage we have a condensed summary of the characteristics of the early Church that demonstrates their commitment.

> It was a learning Church. The word doctrine in verse 42 is not passive; it is active. The phrase means that they persisted in listening to the apostles as they taught. One of the great perils of the Church is a static religion which looks back instead of forward. Just because the riches of Christ are unsearchable and inexhaustible we should ever be looking forward. The Christian must journey, not looking to the sunset, but to the sunrise. We should count it a wasted day when we do not learn something new and when we have not penetrated more deeply into the wisdom and the grace of God.[104]

There was no departure from the apostles' doctrine, because it was the truth of God. Throughout the book of Acts we see an emphasis on the teaching of the Word of God.[105] The church in Berea was considered nobler than those in Thessalonica, because upon hearing the word, they "received the word with great eagerness, examining the

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[102] Acts 2:41-42 (The Message).
[103] W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996), 127.
[104] William Barclay, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1955), 25.
[105] Acts 6:3-4, Acts 8:30-35, and Acts 17:2-11.

Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."[106] They demonstrated their growing commitment to Christ by their attendance upon the preaching of the Word and the apostles' doctrine. They were discipled to be taught, and they were willing to be taught.

Paul tells Titus, "Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives."[107] In the Epistles, especially in the writings of Paul, the call to teach Christian truth is a significant part of the call to ministry. Thomas Oden's *Pastoral Theology* notifies us "'Able to teach'[108] is traditionally thought to be a precondition of inner calling and an important criterion applied to the church's outward assessment of the call to ministry."[109] If Preachers are called to be teachers, this implies that believers should be learners who study the Word of God.

Teaching and learning (in this thesis-project combined into one category namely studying) are important because they lead to action. Study is also important because guidance, correction and a ground for right action is established. One means of measuring the level of a believer's commitment to Christ is attendance at the teaching ministry opportunities of the church.

Commitment Demonstrated Through Serving

The preacher who is serious about God's Word will also challenge hearers to demonstrate their growing commitment to Christ and His Church through serving one another. In the Gospel of John, on the night Jesus was betrayed, deserted, and before He

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[106] Acts 17:11.
[107] Titus 3:14 (NIV).
[108] 2 Timothy 2:24.
[109] Oden, *Pastoral*, 142.

was to be crucified, Jesus washed the disciples feet. John records Jesus saying, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."[110] In Luke's account of this scene the disciples were disputing over who would be the greatest in the Kingdom:

> And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.[111]

In the washing of his disciples' feet, Jesus gives a picture with His actions of a remarkable act of servanthood and true greatness. *The Evangelical Dictionary* informs us that, "According to Jewish laws and traditions regarding the relationship between a teacher and his disciples, a teacher had no right to demand or expect that his disciples would wash his feet."[112] It was more absurd and unimaginable that the Master would wash His disciple's feet. It was customary that the lowest servant of the house would wash the feet of the guests as they came into the house, especially for a formal meal. For some reason, this did not happen when Jesus and the disciples came into the room. This is not about the ritual of foot washing; our commitment to Jesus Christ involves serving one another.

> They[113] ought therefore to wash one another's feet. It is unlikely that this to be taken as a regulation promulgated in the interest of pedal cleanliness. Though on occasion disciples ought to perform this needful service for one another, the point of Jesus' saying is rather that they should have a

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[110] John 13:14 (NIV).
[111] Luke 22:24-27.
[112] Elwell, *Evangelical*, 419.
[113] ὑμεῖς puts stress on the disciples. They too must act in the same spirit of service so challengingly demonstrated by Jesus.

> readiness to perform the lowliest service. No act of service should be beneath them. Jesus makes it clear that His action was no casual event. It set them an example which they were to follow.[114]

Preachers should preach for this level of commitment, demonstrated in the act of service to one another. *The Discipline* remind those who practice foot washing as an ordinance or sacrament that ritual should serve as a reminder and "teach obedience and submission to authority."[115] The passage ends with a blessing, a reminder that committed life is to be lived and not just an ideal to be contemplated. Warren Wiersbe notes the relationship between studying and service in this passage:

> It is not enough just to know this truth; we must put it into practice. …studying can stir us emotionally or enlighten us intellectually; but it cannot bless us spiritually until we do what Jesus told us to do. This is the only way to lasting happiness.[116]

Joshua's challenge to the children of Israel contained seven references to service and the manifestation of commitment through serving:

> Now, therefore, fear the LORD and **serve** Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers **served** beyond the River and in Egypt, and **serve** the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to **serve** the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will **serve**: whether the gods which your fathers **served** which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will **serve** the LORD.[117]

The connection between commitment and service is made throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the early church the believers were able to encourage one another through acts of service to one another. Paul told the Galatians, "For you were called to freedom,

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[114] Leon Morris, F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament, The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), 620-621.
[115] Primitive, *Discipline*, 59.
[116] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Transformed: Expository Study of John 13-21* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 20.
[117] Joshua 24:14 (**Bold** added for emphasis).

brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."[118] Paul called the believers to serve one another. Philip Comfort's *Life Application Bible Commentary on Galatians* shares this insight into this passage:

> This was freedom at its deepest level, for it allowed people to submit voluntarily to slavery to one another (the Greek verb (δουλεύω doulenete) translated serve actually refers to the service of a slave). Serving in this way gives the believers deep joy. This teaching forms the very heart of Christianity, but it presents a paradox. We are freed from slavery to sin to become slaves to one another.[119]

And again, Paul tells the Galatians, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who are of the household of faith."[120] Paul does not discount the importance of the service rendered to others, nor does Paul insist on service exclusively to fellow believers but he uses the word μάλιστα meaning "especially, chiefly or most of all." Above all others believers should serve one another. Paul explains the reason the Church was given apostles, prophets, evangelist and pastor and teachers:

> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.[121]

It is clearly stated that the purpose of these gifts of leadership is so that the saints or God's people might be equipped for the work of ministry or service, so that the body of Christ would be built up or expanded and strengthened. Philip Comfort explains in the *Life Application Bible Commentary of Ephesians*, "The word for 'equip' means to make

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[118] Galatians 5:13.
[119] Philip Comfort, *Life Application Bible Commentary: Galatians* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 174.
[120] Galatians 6:10.
[121] Ephesians 4:12-13 (NIV).

right, like the setting of a broken bone, or to bring to completion by training or restoring."[122]

There are numerous biblical examples of the people of God being servants. To be a Christian is to be a servant like Jesus. Jesus often taught about service and servants in His parables. A biblical model of the church portrays it as servant of the servant Lord. Migliore suggests, "This may also be called the diaconal model."[123] Morris Ashcraft shares in *Christian Faith and Belief* "The great Christological passage of Philippians begins with an ethical admonition, "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God.... Emptied himself, taking the form of a servant."[124] Donald S. Whitney states very clearly:

> We need to be honest with the facts about the Discipline of serving God. Like the Pony Express, serving God is not a job for the casually interested. It's costly service. He asks for your life. He asks for service to Him to become a priority, not a pastime. He doesn't want servants who will give Him the leftovers of their life's commitments. Serving God isn't a short-term responsibility either. Unlike the Pony Express, His Kingdom will never go under, no matter how technological our world gets.[125]

Believers need to be challenged to reach greater commitment to Jesus as demonstrated in service to one another. One means of measuring the level of a believer's commitment to Christ is participation in the service ministry possibilities of the church.

Commitment Demonstrated Through Giving

The preacher who is serious about God's Word will also challenge hearers to demonstrate their commitment through giving. Luke records these words of Jesus in His sermon on the plain:

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[122] Philip Comfort, *Life Application Bible Commentary: Ephesians* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1996), 83.
[123] Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 196.
[124] Ashcraft, *Christian*, 311.
[125] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 110.

> Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.[126]

The Greek δίδωμι, which occurs over four hundred times in the Greek concordance of the New Testament carries the meaning to give, to give something to someone. Ralph Earle explains, "the verb ὑπερεκχύν(ν)ω translated 'running over' is found only here in the New Testament. It expresses the super abundance of God's giving back to us when we give generously."[127] The Pulpit Commentary shares this helpful insight:

> The grand characteristic feature of the society of His followers must be generosity. They must be known among men as givers rather than judges.[128]

The stewardship of our possessions and more importantly the giving of ourselves is one discipline where commitment to Christ is demonstrated. The greatest example of commitment revealed through the act of giving is modeled by God Himself. John shares, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[129] God demonstrated His love commitment toward humanity though the ultimate act of giving His Son for our salvation, how much then should believers demonstrate their commitment to Christ through the act of giving?

The early church showed the power of God in their lives because Jesus became much more important to them than their possessions. Luke records in Acts, "All the Lord's followers often met together, and they shared everything they had. They would

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[126] Luke 6:38.
[127] Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 61.
[128] Ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary Volume XVI Mark Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 148.
[129] John 3:16 (KJV).

sell their property and possessions and give the money to whoever needed it."[130] Therefore, "…..there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need."[131]

Giving is of such importance that the first act of chastisement in the early church came because of dishonesty regarding sacrificial giving. Unlike in Acts 4 that illustrates the generosity of Barnabas, Acts 5 opens with *But*:

> The opening But contrast Ananias and Sapphira with Barnabas. They sold a piece of land, but kept back part of the price which they had received for it before bringing the proceeds to the apostles for the common-good fund of the church; placing the money at the apostles' feet means that it was given as a trust, not as a personal gift.[132]

Earle explains "'kept back' the verb (νοσφίζω) means 'set apart for oneself.' That is why NASB and NIV translations have 'kept back… for himself'. Ananias cared more for himself than he did for God or the needy ones around him."[133] Ananias and Sapphira desired praise for what they did not do. The story of Ananias in the book of Acts parallels the story of Achan in the book of Joshua (Joshua 7:21). In both stories an act of dishonesty interrupts the progress of the people of God. One means of measuring the level of a believer's commitment to Christ is giving offerings and the amount of time devoted to the church.

Conclusion of Biblical Framework

Throughout sacred history of God's people, certain individuals were called to challenge God's people to greater commitment to God. Today, God still desires our total

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[130] Acts 2:44-45 (Contemporary English Version).
[131] Acts 4:34-35.
[132] R. V. G. Tasker, General Ed., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 111.
[133] Earle, *Word*, 102.

commitment. The charge to every preacher of every generation is expressed in these words of Charles Wesley:

> A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify,
> a never-dying soul to save, and fit it for the sky.
> To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill;
> O may it all my powers engage to do my Master's will![134]

God desires those who believe and trust Him to "Commit your way to the LORD."[135] The one who has been charged to preach the Word of God to the people of God must willingly challenge believers to a greater level of commitment to Jesus Christ. Among God's people who are the ekklesia of God, there have been those who have been called out from among the called out ones, to confront believers with the high demands of God. This commitment can be demonstrated in dedication to studying Scriptures, faithfulness in serving one another, and responsibility to giving of one's resources.

Greater depth of commitment to Jesus Christ is a tough challenge, but it leads to greater levels of fulfillment in life. The question the preacher must ask is not 'should I' challenge people to greater levels of commitment but rather 'how can I' challenge believers to study, serve and give their best and in so doing glorify God. Will we faithfully proclaim God' Word and will we be examples of commitment by our own level of study, service and giving? Preachers need to acknowledge that too many "chickens" are sitting in the pews. We must pray for and preach for more "pigs," fully committed to following Christ.

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[134] Charles Wesley, "A Charge to Keep I Have," *HymnSite.com – Christian Online Music*, http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh413.txt, accessed June 9, 2010.
[135] Psalm 37:5.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

A Peanuts comic strip shows Lucy walking up to Charlie Brown and a fence full of targets with arrows in the bull's eye. Lucy says, "Charles you are very good at that," to which Charlie Brown responds, "I wasn't at first, but once I figured it out I can get the arrow in the bull's eye every time." Lucy, with a puzzled look on her face, asks, "What did you have to figure out?" Charlie Brown answers, "At first I would paint the target and then shoot the arrow, I missed every time. But once I figured out that if I shoot the arrows first and then draw the target, I can get the arrows in the bull's eye every time."

Unfortunately, a lot of preaching is that way, preachers let a quiver full of word-arrows fly around the congregation and when one happens to hit somebody, the preacher quickly runs down, draws a target around the word-arrow and says, "this is what the Lord intended!" It is much harder to draw the target in the study, prepare to shoot the word-arrows before the congregation assembles, and then stand up before them and shoot from the bow of preaching at the pre-drawn target during the sermon.

While chapter two focused on the theological and biblical foundations for preaching that challenges believers to move to greater levels of commitment, this chapter will interact with the current literature on preaching that targets the commitment of believers. First, we will analyze the need for biblical preaching that challenges believers. Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching,* will serve as the moderator for this conversation while others will contribute. Next, William E. Hull's[1] *Strategic Preaching,* will lead the discussion on the role of the preaching ministry as a means to challenge believers' commitment. We will also explore Bill Hull's *Building High Commitment in a Low*

[1] Not to be confused with Bill Hull.

Commitment World, to answer what is the normal Christian standard for discipleship and how it is demonstrated in spiritual disciplines? Finally, a look at Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church*, specifically his discussion concerning the different levels of commitment. Although, these four books will be our main conversational partners, other writers will contribute for both confirmation and diversity.

Why now? Why the need for preaching that targets commitment? What kind of preaching will be effective in today's context? The times in which we live have been described as postmodern, a movement widely recognized since the 1970s. Scott Black Johnson says, "to be Post-Modern is to be Post Certain."[2] Maurice Watson adds, "The postmodern person looks at the world through a different pair of lenses than people who lived 30 or 40 years ago."[3] However, Susan Singer says, "Perhaps post-modernity not only raises questions and presents challenges, but also provides new frameworks in which the work of forming commitments and holding convictions can be done."[4] In these postmodern times there is a real fear of commitment.

Trevor Emdon in an online article entitled "Combating Commitment Phobia" wrote:

> Commitment phobia is rooted in fear -- fear of lost options or fear of making poor decisions. Most especially, commitment phobia is the fear and avoidance of having to commit to anything, but especially relationships. And like the proverb, it's a double edged sword: on the one hand you avoid obligations, ties, and commitments yet at the same time the commitment phobic may secretly crave the lives of those who committed and the growth that those roots produced. Commitment phobias are the women who say, "All men are jerks," or the men who

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[2] Ronald J. Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell, Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 28.

[3] Maurice Watson, "Don't Preach to Me: A Commitment to Proclamation in a Postmodern World," *The African-American Pulpit* 3 (2009), 13.

[4] Susan J. Singer, "Educating for Commitment: Insights from Postmodernity," *Religious Education* 3 (2005), 298.

> claim, "Women are only out to get my money" - rationalizations to justify avoiding a committed relationship. Men are generally considered more commitment-phobic than women, but recent research suggests that this might be a case of stereotyping, and that it is not necessarily a gender-specific thing.[5]

Roy E. Ciampa, however, reminds us that believers are still called by Jesus to be disciples:

> To be a disciple is to be one who is committed to learning from, and obeying, the teachings and example of one's master/teacher. Since Christ was committed to proclaiming the need for repentance and the good news of the Kingdom of God, and sent the 12 and then the 72 out to do the same (Luke 9:1-2; 10:1), his disciples understand that they must be committed to that task as well. Since he was known for ministering to those who were marginalized and rejected by mainstream society, his disciples recognize that they also must be committed to an inclusive approach to ministry. The disciple learns the teachings of the master and passes them on to others.[6]

Preachers in this postmodern generation must answer the call to be like Jesus especially in the area of challenging the commitment of believers. John T. & James R. Carroll have said about the ministry of Jesus:

> If those outside his circle of committed followers found Jesus' ministry disturbing and even threatening, persons drawn to his side found his teaching just as unsettling. He set the claims of God's realm above the most sacred of duties and relationships. The call to discipleship meant possessions, security, home, and even family itself were now dispensable. And Jesus challenged those who would commit themselves to his cause to give up everything they held dear.[7]

The Carrolls' also have this to say:

> Jesus makes the righteous uncomfortable with his acceptance of the undeserving, but he proceeds to make those who would follow him uncomfortable by demanding that they give up all for the sake of God's

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[5] Trevor Emdon, "Combating Commitment Phobia", *Ezine @rticles*, http://EzineArticles.com, accessed May, 2007.

[6] Roy E. Ciampa, "Jesus & Discipleship: The View from the Great Commission", *Contact Magazine* 10 (2009): 4.

[7] John T. Carroll & James R. Carroll, *Preaching the Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1.

> reign. The Scandal of grace stems from Jesus challenge to his opponents to acknowledge his work with "sinners." The cost of grace flows from his challenge to his disciples to live out of a radical, wholehearted commitment to God.[8]

The preacher stands and speaks for the Lord so that some people will hear; therefore, the preacher should strive to preach God's Word faithfully. Broadus adds instead of hearing Jesus directly, "Ideally the preacher stands in God's stead and speaks for him."[9]

Donald Sunukjian says, "The Bible is God's voice, spanning the ages. The role of the biblical preacher is to echo that voice in this generation."[10] Jesus taught that His followers were to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."[11] Just as salt and light have an altering impact on their surroundings, ministers of Jesus are to be altering agents in the world around them. Jeanne Porter wrote about a church full of leaders:

> Leaders are called to change people, to challenge mindsets, and to convert the social environments in which people live, work, and interact. Effecting change at many levels is a vital leadership function of the Church in the first century and in the twenty-first century. What is needed to build a Church full of leaders is a commitment to invest in the people of the congregation by developing their leadership skills with the aim of transforming situations, structures, systems and social milieus.[12]

How can we effectively challenge believers' commitment? What has God given this generation of preachers that can effectively transform the lives of believers? The preacher desiring to communicate with postmodern must hear and heed the same charge Paul gave Timothy in the first century, "Preach the Word."[13] That is easier said than

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[8] Carroll, *Hard Sayings*, 65.
[9] John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Fourth ed., 1979), 18.
[10] Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 9.
[11] Matthew 5:13, 14.
[12] Jeanne Porter, "Building a Church Full of Leaders: A Model for Ministry in the Twenty-First Century," *The African-American Pulpit* 6 (2003), 17.
[13] 2 Timothy 4:2.

done. First, we need a simple guide to biblical preaching focusing on Scripture, Structure, and Significance.

Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*

In this section, our moderator is Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*. However, we will also listen to Ramesh Richard through *Preparing Expository Sermons,* because of his contribution in developing expository sermons. And Donald R. Sunukjian's *Invitation to Biblical Preaching,* will contribute clarity and relevance to this discussion. Haddon Robinson defines expository preaching as:

> The communication of a biblical concept derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.[14]

Ramesh Richard offers his working definition:

> Expository preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts and influence behavior toward godliness.[15]

Sunukjian offers a simpler definition, "we define true biblical preaching by how the biblical material is treated – that is, faithful to the meaning and flow of the original author and relevant to the contemporary listener."[16] Simply, the modern preacher attempts to echo the central idea of the biblical writer to their modern audience.

Not everyone is as committed to expository preaching as Robinson, Richard and Sunukjian. Thomas G. Long remarks in *The Witness of Preaching*:

> Over the years many strong and effective sermons have been preached that were surely gospel sermons even though they were not linked explicitly to

[14] Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 21.
[15] Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 19.
[16] Sunukjian, *Invitation*, 13.

> any particular passage in the bible. Sermons of this kind, often called "topical" sermons usually appeal to general theological themes, doctrines, creedal statements, and the like, rather than to specific biblical texts.[17]

In *Creative Styles of Preaching*, Mark Barger Elliott presents nine sermon styles because he believes, "Our congregations have grown, or will soon grow, restless with one preaching style."[18] Robinson and Robinson concede, "There is no such entity as 'the best sermon form.' Sermons can take various forms, but no preaching form came down from heaven."[19] Nevertheless, if the preacher seeking to communicate the eternal truths of scripture to the postmodern mind is going to challenge believers with the Word of God, Robinson concludes, "The type of preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository preaching."[20]

The first step in biblical preaching is deriving the central idea of the sermon from the central idea of the Scripture. Robinson explains, "Expository preaching attempts to present and apply the truths of a specific biblical passage."[21] The preacher who takes God's Word seriously and strives to change the commitment level of the hearers understands, "biblical exposition binds the preacher and the people to the only source of true spiritual change. Because hearts are transformed when people are confronted with the Word of God, expository preachers are committed to saying what God says."[22] Donald Sunukjian expresses, "The first step in preparing a biblical message is to study

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[17] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989), 49.
[18] Mark Barger Elliott, *Creative Styles of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2000), ix.
[19] Haddon W. Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 2003), 10.
[20] Robinson, *Biblical*, 20.
[21] Robinson, *Biblical*, 21.
[22] Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text (*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 15.

the passage."[23] Ramesh Richard echoes, "Studying the biblical text is step 1 of the sermon-preparation process."[24] Charles Booth advises:

> The Preacher must always be careful not to impress upon a text that which he or she wants it to say. Instead, the preacher is given the ethical assignment of conveying the essential message of a text through careful exegesis.[25]

Haddon Robinson suggests asking two questions of the biblical text: "What is the author talking about?" and "What exactly is the author saying about what he is talking about?"[26] A concern of hermeneutics is to ask the right questions. So writes Sidney Greidanus, "Asking the right questions is of crucial importance, for asking the wrong questions will undoubtedly result in receiving wrong answers. One of the weighty issues in hermeneutics is, therefore, how to ask the right questions."[27] The process of questioning the text results in the development of one central idea.

Most books on preaching agree that a sermon should have one central idea, major point or theme derived from the biblical passage. Conversely, what is called the central idea or theme differs by author. H. Grady Davis calls it an "the Central Thought,"[28] John Broadus calls it the "Proposition,"[29] Haddon Robinson uses the term the "Big Idea,"[30] Paul Scott Wilson calls it the "Major Concern"[31] of the text, Bryan Chapell calls it the "Fallen Condition Focus,"[32] Ramesh Richard calls it the "central proposition of the text (CPT)"[33] and Henry Mitchell calls it the "Controlling Idea."

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[23] Sunukjian, *Invitation*, 19.
[24] Richard, *Preparing*, 33.
[25] Charles E. Booth, "What Ever Happened to Hermeneutics?" *The African-American Pulpit* 6 (2003), 6.
[26] Haddon Robinson's discussion in Biblical Preaching, Chapter 2, "The Big Idea" 33-50.
[27] Greidanus, *Modern*, 17.
[28] H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg, 1958), 20.
[29] Broadus, *Preparation*, 170.
[30] Robinson, *Biblical*, 33-46.
[31] Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1988), 131.
[32] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 14.
[33] Richard, *Preparing*, 65-66.

Long, in the *Witness of Preaching,* conceived the terms "focus statement" and "function statement" to identify the goals a preacher addresses in sermon preparation. Long writes:

> A focus statement is a concise description of the central, controlling, and unifying theme of the sermon. In short, this is what the sermon will be "about." A function statement is a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers.[34]

With all due allowance for the various ways this is expressed, our sources all maintain that every sermon should have a central idea.

Samuel D. Proctor wrote that preachers should focus on a proposition, "a sentence that succinctly states the sermon's purpose."[35] John Killinger says, "The first thing in making a sermon, the *sine qua non*, is the idea. There can be no sermon that was not first preceded by an idea or a theme."[36] Yet, Killinger does not agree that this central idea should only come from the biblical passage. He suggests, "The idea may come in one of two ways." Either from a lectionary, "the idea will usually come while he or she is brooding on the scripture," or "if the preacher does not use a lectionary, the idea may come at any time,"[37] and from anywhere. Deriving the idea from the passage is one of the hardest steps. Haddon Robinson says, "This is sweaty, difficult work, but it has to be done."[38] Developing the idea from the scripture is ideal to communicate what God is saying.

The second important step in biblical preaching is structuring your sermon from the central idea. After answering the question "what we have to preach and why we are

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[34] Long, *Witness*, 86.
[35] Samuel D. Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), 19.
[36] John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching 2ed.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 49.
[37] Killinger, *Fundamentals*, 49.
[38] Robinson, *Biblical*, 70.

preaching it," Haddon Robinson states, "Now the question before us is this: What must be done with this idea to carry out the purpose? What shape will the sermon assume?"[39] Donald Sunukjian explains, "The sermon outline essentially says to the listener, this is happening in our lives today, just as it happened in the biblical world, for this kind of thing happens as we walk with God." Sunukjian continues, "The sermon outline shows how the truth of the biblical passage will be communicated in a contemporary way to your specific audience."[40] Haddon Robinson further explains,

> Sermons develop in three major ways: deductively, semi-inductively, or inductively. In the deductive arrangement, the idea is stated completely as part of the introduction to the sermon, and then the sermon develops out of that idea. In the inductive development, the introduction leads only to the first point in the sermon, then with strong transitions each new point links to the previous point until the idea of the sermon emerges in the conclusion.[41]

Ramesh Richard devoted an entire chapter to structuring the sermon. He says, "Basically, sermons are developed in one of two ways: deductively or inductively."[42] Donald R. Sunukjian contributes, "Most messages can be structured either deductively or inductively. You can choose."[43] Fred B. Craddock agrees,

> There are basically two directions in which thought moves: deductive and inductive. Simply stated, deductive movement is from the general truth to the particular application or experience while inductive is the reverse. Homiletically, deduction means stating the thesis, breaking it down into points or sub-theses, explaining and illustrating these points, and applying them to the particular situations of the hearers. Everyone recognizes this as the movement of sermons in the main stream of traditional preaching.[44]

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[39] Robinson, *Biblical,* 116.
[40] Sunukjian, *Invitation*, 29.
[41] Robinson, *Biblical,* 116. (See Appendix 1)
[42] Richard, *Preparing*, 96.
[43] Sunukjian, *Invitation*, 155.
[44] Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1971), 54.

In spite of this, Craddock quickly eliminates one of the two. He says concerning the deductive movement, "There is no democracy here, no dialogue, no listening by the speaker, no contributing by the hearer. If the congregation is on the team, it is as javelin catcher. One may even detect a downward movement, a condescension of thought, in the pattern."[45] The alternative suggested by Craddock is obviously inductive. He adds, "The inductive process is fundamental to the American way of life."[46] Haddon Robinson is not as dismissive of the deductive structure but he does give a special endorsement for inductive structure by writing,

> Inductive sermons have a special appeal to inhabitants of a culture dominated by television and motion pictures. We have become a storied culture. Whether it is a mystery drama, a comedy or even a sports contest, there is a large element of induction. The drama isn't solved until the end of the last act, and the joke leads up to the punch line, and the sports event moves toward the final score. Inductive sermons fit that way of thinking. This is particularly true of a specific type of inductive sermon- a story told. You connect with a modern audience when you tell a biblical story with insight and imagination....Anyone who loves the Bible must value the story, for whatever else the Bible is, it is a book of stories. Old Testament theology comes packaged in narratives of men and women who go running off to set up their hand-made gods, and of others who take God seriously enough to bet their lives on him. When Jesus appeared, he came telling stories, and most of them have entered the world's folklore.[47]

Fred Craddock agrees with Robinson and the appeal of the inductive sermon's structure:

> If he is a good preacher, he refuses to be dull. And so between the three or four "points" that mark the dull deductive trail he plants humor, anecdotes, illustrations, poetry, or perhaps even enlivening hints of heresy and threats of butchering sacred cows. But the perceptive preacher knows instinctively that something is wrong with his sermon: not its exegetical

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[45] Craddock, *Authority*, 55.
[46] Craddock, *Authority*, 58.
[47] Robinson, *Biblical*, 129 – 130.

> support, not its careful preparation, not its relevance; it is the movement that is wrong.[48]

Craddock's answer to this dilemma was for the sermon to recreate with the hearers, the inductive movement experienced by the preacher in exegesis. Thomas Long chimes in:

> The main issue in this stage of theocentric interpretation is to ensure that the form of the sermon is in line with its theocentric homiletical idea and purpose. (1) Does this development communicate what the passage teaches? (2) Will it accomplish my purpose with this audience? If your development communicates your message, by all means use it; if it gets in the way of your message, then devise a form more in keeping with the idea and purpose of the Scriptures and the needs of your listeners.[49]

The purpose of the structure, whether deductive or inductive, is to bring unity and flow to the sermon, a sense of wholeness.

Duane Litfin adds to this conversation by acknowledging that this longing for unity is also the way God has designed our minds: "The human mind is constantly seeking to discover unity in the stimuli it receives, to separate those items that seem to be related to one thing from those that are related to another."[50] Litfin explains that human minds not only seek unity, but also order: "This is intimately involved with our desire for unity. It is not enough to discover which parts are related to which whole; we also seek to discover orderly relationships between and among the parts."[51] In addition to unity and order, the human mind also seeks progress. Litfin points out:

> Some entities have a chronological dimension to them. A symphony is made up of thousands of notes played on perhaps scores of different instruments. Yet the composer has so designed the symphony that it organizes all these many notes into a unified whole. In this the symphony is not unlike the puzzle. On another level, however, the symphony is very different. We may lay out the pieces of the puzzle so we can see them all

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[48] Craddock, *Authority*, 125.
[49] Long, *Witness*, 131.
[50] Duane A. Litfin, *Public Speaking: A Handbook for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 80.
[51] Litfin, *Public*, 81.

> at once, but with the symphony we can only hear one part at a time. All we have of the symphony is what we are hearing at the moment (combined, of course, with what we can recall of the past and what we may be able to anticipate of the future). Thus, for us to make sense of a symphony — or any "unity" that has a time dimension, such as a play, a novel, or a speech — the matter of progress becomes significant. As we try to sort out the pieces we perceive, to discover their relationships, we are looking for an order consisting largely of some sort of progression, one thing following another in an appropriate chronological relationship.[52]

When it comes to preaching, Keith Willhite says, "The mind of the listener searches for overall unity."[53]

The person in the pew wonders: how does the whole sermon fit together? How do the various parts of the sermon relate to each other? How does one part lead into the next contributing to the overall order and unity of the message? "Because our minds — and our listeners' minds, too — seek unity in what we perceive, a speech, to be maximally effective, ought to be the embodiment of one major idea. Having a central idea tends to build unity into a speech, allowing us to work in conjunction with the natural tendencies of our listeners' minds."[54] As Haddon Robinson writes, "Effective sermons major in biblical ideas brought together into an overarching unity."[55] This is the "big idea" of biblical preaching, "The sermon should be a bullet, not buckshot."[56] As Keith Willhite observes:

> A single bullet is much more powerful than a small piece of shot or even the collective effect of many shots. A disjointed comment on words or phrases will be of little value in changing lives since propositions of God's Truth, not minutiae, move people to think and act differently.[57]

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[52] Litfin, *Public*, 81-82.
[53] Keith Willhite, "A Bullet versus Buckshot: What Makes the Big Idea Work", *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 21-22.
[54] Litfin, *Public*, 82.
[55] Robinson, *Biblical*, 39.
[56] Robinson, *Biblical*, 35.
[57] Willhite "Bullet", *Idea,* 22.

To see results from the faithful preaching of God's Word, the preacher's sermon must have unity.

David Buttrick underscores the importance of unity, "Above all, moves must be unified. They must make a single statement. Basically moves are an elaboration of an idea that can be expressed in a single clear sentence."[58] Whether the sermon flows *from* the central idea (deductively) or to the central idea (inductively) a good sermon must have good structure for unity.

The third important step in biblical preaching is significance. Believers have to see the meaning, the implication and the importance of the scripture in their lives. In order to engage in faithful proclamation of God's Word about devotion, a preacher must have a thorough knowledge of the world in which the listeners are attempting to live faithfully. Preaching must not only be scriptural, it also must be significant for the purpose of growth.

To bridge the gap between the biblical message and this postmodern mindset, the preacher needs to apply the homiletical principles in ways that aid the hearer in knowing how to solve present-day cultural problems. "The applicational preacher looks at the text for references to biblical values that counteract the prevalent cultural values."[59] Haddon Robinson explains:

> While Christian preaching has developed under the strong influence of Greek and Roman rhetoric, no biblical mandate demands that sermons take that prescribed form. In fact, the teachers and prophets in the Scriptures used parables, narratives, poems, riddles, speeches, letters, and visual aids to communicate their ideas. They simply asked, "What do I

[58] David Buttrick, *Homiletic* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 49.
[59] Joseph M. Stowell III, "Preaching for Change," *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 137.

> say to this audience through what channel for what purpose, for what effect?" and they said it.[60]

Sunukjian describes significance with the term relevance: "Relevance occurs when the listeners 'see' how the biblical truth applies to a specific situation." He continues, "Relevancy is broader than application. Application implies something for the listener to do. Relevance simply shows how the message connects to life."[61] Richard suggests asking the question, "On the basis of the central proposition of this text, what does God want my people to understand and obey?"[62]

Time has caused a great chasm between the world of scripture and the world of technology in which we live and this chasm must be overcome. Truth found in scripture must be applied to the life of people today. Henry H. Mitchell clarifies, "A fitting marriage of biblical text and behavioral purpose – the goal of spiritual growth – must precede the birth of every sermon."[63] Faris Whitsell adds, "A sixth consideration in persuasion is audience analysis. This means finding out the facts about his congregation and about the physical factors under which he preaches. The preacher should know his audience's age range, educational range, occupation, cultural interests, prejudices, sex division, and spiritual maturity."[64]

One way for the theme of commitment to become significant for believers is the use of the sermon genre "character sketches" of biblical personalities offered by Henry Mitchell. It will be easy to see the commitment attribute in the people of God. "The person chosen is representative of a trait worthy of emulation, and the hearer so identifies

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[60] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Sermons: How Twelve Preachers Apply the Principles of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989) 11.
[61] Sunukjian, *Invitation*, 106.
[62] Richard, *Preparing*, 78.
[63] Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 51.
[64] Faris D. Whitsell, *Power in Expository Preaching* (Westwood, N.J: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 68.

with the person as to become desirous of embodying that trait also."[65] One should be able to communicate how commitment contributed to the faithfulness of Abraham, Ruth, Joshua, Daniel, Mary, Paul and many others.

Haddon Robinson says a concern of the preacher "in the development of a sermon is the audience. Sermons, unlike essays, are not addressed 'to whom it may concern'; they are delivered to men and women sitting at a certain time of the day, usually on Sunday in a building with a zip code."[66] Robinson goes on to add, "When the pastor stands to preach it is to that particular people he must speak."[67] Craddock adds, "A knowledge of those to whom it is addressed would contribute as much or more to its understanding as would knowing the person who delivered it."[68] John Maxwell observes that the preacher should be concerned about connecting with the audience more than simply communicating. He makes the following contribution to our conversation on significance:

> Connecters always are willing to risk leaving their world to get into the world of the person they're trying to reach. Jesus of course, modeled that continually in the gospels. The Master Connecter was always where the people were, were always asking questions that would stir their hearts a little bit, always connecting with them, always putting them first – then out comes the message.[69]

Expository preaching is the most effective way to challenge believer's commitment because it derives its central idea from scripture, it utilizes the most effective structure and it is concerned with making the message significant to the hearer.

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[65] Mitchell, *Celebration*, 101.
[66] Robinson, *Biblical Sermons,* 10.
[67] Robinson, *Sermons*, 10.
[68] Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985), 31.
[69] Michael Duduit, "Communicating or Connecting? An Interview with John Maxwell", *Preaching: Leading the Church, Proclaiming the Word 26*, (2010), 6.

William E. Hull's *Strategic Preaching*

Now that we have a basic understanding of biblical preaching, how can preaching be a tool to challenge the commitment of believers? Is it possible to design a system that challenges believers and establishes intentional progress as suggested by Bill Hull? What strategy can be applied to the preaching ministry of the church?

Aubrey Malphurs defines strategy as, "...the process that determines how you will accomplish the mission of your ministry."[70] One book that is helpful in this endeavor is William E. Hull's *Strategic Preaching: the Role of the Pulpit in Pastoral Leadership*. This book defines strategic preaching as "the kind of Christian proclamation that is designed to guide a congregation in the fulfillment of its mission."[71] What makes this book unique is the focus on implementing the vision of the Church through preaching. Hull challenges pastors to follow a new paradigm in pastoral ministry, one that utilizes the pulpit ministry to achieve the strategic goals of the church by challenging the congregation to move towards God's calling.

First, Hull discusses three paradigms, the biblical, the rhetorical and the relational paradigms that have historically served to diminish the strategic aspect of preaching. However, Hull clearly states the benefits of these older paradigms:

> My discussion of these three dominant approaches is not intended to imply a repudiation of any of their valuable features but only to suggest the revision of each of them by the introduction of a strategic dimension. The biblical paradigm offers a powerful vehicle for strategic preaching when undergirded by a hermeneutic that knows how to discern the intentionality of the ancient text and its relevance for today. Likewise, all of the arts of persuasion in the rhetorical paradigm provided needed motivation to move a company of believers from complacency with the status quo to a venturesome engagement with authentic risk. The relational paradigm ensures that pulpit and pew move together, each prodding the other in a

[70] Aubrey Malphurs, *Ministry Nuts & Bolts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1997), 137.
[71] William E. Hull, *Strategic Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2006), 2.

> dialectic of shared decision-making. In other words, the elements of strength in all three paradigms are valuable if infused with a sense of where the congregation is trying to go and what it is trying to do in response to the beckoning of the gospel.[72]

Hull suggests a strategic sermon should, "be shaped on the basis of a clear, concise and coherent statement of strategy."[73] Secondly, Hull suggests asking, "How its structure may be put in the service of strategy?"[74] Hull does not mean to decide between deductive or inductive structures, but whether the preacher should begin in the present or in the past with the biblical situation or the contemporary situation being addressed.

Another suggestion by Hull offers a better use of the introduction and conclusion. He says, "I suggest that you emphasize contextuality in the introduction and intentionality in the conclusion."[75] Hull summarizes what he sees as the benefits of strategic preaching by sharing these words:

> Here its difference from strategic preaching becomes more apparent. Lectionary preaching begins with the Bible and its answers, while life-situation preaching begins with the people and their questions. But Strategic preaching begins with the vision of a New Age in which "it does not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2). It goes to the Bible for a clear definition of that horizon because Scripture shows us both how to succeed and how to fail in claiming the promises that are yet to be fulfilled.[76]

If the strategic goal of the preacher is to move the congregation and the individual believer to greater levels of commitment, Hull's strategic planning process can be beneficial. Strategic preaching fits the definition offered by Donald Sunukjian, "The purpose of the sermon is not to impart knowledge but to influence behavior – not to

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[72] W. Hull, *Strategic*, 12.
[73] W. Hull, *Strategic*, 77.
[74] W. Hull, *Strategic*, 79.
[75] W. Hull, *Strategic*, 81.
[76] W. Hull, *Strategic*, 91.

inform but to transform."[77] Strategic preaching should be utilized to transform the believers' commitment.

Also, Alice Mathews when talking about leadership that makes a difference shares this insight:

> In every case, Jesus worked to strengthen people in their faith and commitment. This kind of leadership builds strength in Christ's followers. The objective is to enable followers to deal with their problems in ways that please God.[78]

Dr. Mathews instructs, "that it is the leader's task to identify the gap between people's aspirations and their reality and focus attention on the specific issues created by that gap."[79] This forms the strategy to accomplish the goal of increased commitment awareness as well as growth in the commitment of believers.

Stan Toler contributes to our discussion, "audiences of every imaginable socio-economic people group still wait for the prophet/preacher/lead pastor/ facilitator up front to shine the light of God's Word on the road of their journey."[80] The Great Commission is the same: gather people, disciple them, and send them out equipped with power and principles. The shepherd-pastor cannot evade the calling. Sheep still need to know where to find pasture and how to stay away from wolves dressed like one of them. Faris Whitsell asks, "How can the pastor make his immature members biblically literate and spiritually mature?" and quickly answers, "Nothing will help them more than interesting expository preaching."[81] Expository preaching combined with strategic preaching will challenge believers to greater levels of commitment.

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[77] Sunukjian, *Invitation*, 12.
[78] Alice P. Mathews, *Preaching that Speaks to Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 138.
[79] Mathews, *Speaks*, 138.
[80] Stan Toler, "Leading from the Pulpit", *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers* 25 (2009), 17.
[81] Whitsell, *Expository*, 6.

Stan Toler adds, "Preaching is giving directions road by road and turn by turn."[82] The preacher's first concern is to lift up the name of Jesus Christ. The preacher's second concern is to lead individuals into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The preacher's next concern is to help believers grow in their faith and find a place to practice that faith in Christian service. The preacher should weave practical commitment principles into the weekly sermons. This has to be the strategy that is most applicable for commitment growth.

Alice Fryling writes, "God's Word gives life. It causes growth. It is the primary way God helps Christians change."[83] Because our postmodern culture is more steeped in pluralism and relativism, preachers of the gospel must be competent in the art of argumentation. Argumentation in preaching may be defined as persuasion with the intent of changing an attitude or action.[84] Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix add, "One of the most important elements in the preaching event was persuasion."[85] Persuasion is not manipulation. Persuasion is influencing people by making clear arguments from the scriptures. Paul wrote in First Corinthians:

> And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.[86]

John A. Broadus's book *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* has this to say about persuasion:

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[82] Toler, *Leading*, 18.
[83] Alice Fryling, *Disciple-Makers' Handbook* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 141.
[84] Vines, *Power*, 178.
[85] Vines, *Power*, 23.
[86] 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

> The chief part of what is commonly called application is persuasion. It is not enough to convince men of truth, nor enough to make them see how it applies to themselves, and how it might be practicable for them to act it out; but we must "persuade men."[87]

Preaching can be used as a strategy for growth in commitment through the use of argumentation and persuasion.

Vines and Shaddix commend the apostles, for "by use of preaching, they brought men to the point of believing that Jesus was the Christ and deciding to commit themselves to Him."[88] The same is true today, "the purpose statements for most salvation sermons will be similar, since the primary action for which the preacher is calling is commitment to Christ."[89] The same purpose can be utilized when the primary action for which the preacher is calling is greater commitment to Christ and His Church. Ultimately, our preaching is to produce Christ-like commitment in our people.

Dr. Jeanne Porter suggests that, "a systematic leadership development process is needed to build a Church full of leaders."[90] A systematic leadership development process must include the use of the pulpit ministry to inspire, challenge and educate the future leaders. Leaders are highly committed individuals to Christ and His Church, and as they grow those whom they serve will also grow.

We are not speaking of numerical growth but commitment growth. Larry Gilbert of Church Growth Institute perhaps is correct when he observes:

> Taking the 102-member church and turning it into a 5,000-member church requires extraordinary leadership. That cannot be our definition of Success. Bill Hull, director of church ministries for the Evangelical Free

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[87] John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Fourth Edition, 1979), 170.
[88] Vines, *Power*, 23.
[89] Vines, *Power*, 138.
[90] Jeanne Porter, "Building a Church Full of Leaders: A Model for Ministry in the Twenty-First Century", *The African-American Pulpit* 6 (2003), 18.

> Church in America, has written, "Those who pastor the mega churches are usually individuals who have charisma and special gifts. Even though they like to promise pastors of small struggling churches, 'If I can do it, you can too,' it's just not true for most of those who attend church-growth seminars and conferences." We need to help pastors turn a 102-member church into a 112-member church. If this consistent growth, however small, were to happen in thousands of churches, it would revolutionize the body of Christ.[91]

Rather than focus on numerical growth Bill Hull's experience leads him to a more realistic goal, "My experience has shown that where high commitment is taught as normal, as many as 50 to 65 percent will achieve it."[92]

Preaching is relevant in these postmodern days to fulfilling the mission of the church. Maurice Watson the senior pastor of Beulahland Bible Church in Macon, Georgia says, "Whatever else preaching is, it is speech. It has to do with God speaking to and through a human being in order to convey His thoughts and instructions to other human beings."[93] Hebrews express, "God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."[94] The preaching and teaching of the church was paramount to the early Church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Eusebius and John Chrysostom, given the Greek surname *"chrysostomos,"* meaning "golden mouthed," and who was regarded as the greatest pulpit orator of the Greek church.[95]

The God who spoke through the prophets, Jesus, the apostles, and the church fathers continues to call and challenge preachers for this present age. The biblical and

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[91] Larry Gilbert, *Lead or Get out of the Way*, Leadership 16, no. 1 (Summer 1995), 126.
[92] Bill Hull, *Building High commitment in a Low Commitment World* (Grand rapids, MI: Revell, 1995), 34.
[93] Watson, *Don't*, 15.
[94] Hebrews 1:1-2.
[95] Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IX (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 22.

contemporary directive for preaching is laid upon the modern preacher the same way it was laid upon Paul, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."[96] How is one going to remain significant as a preacher in a world filled with skepticism and suspiciousness? One remains relevant because the gospel preached is relevant. The Word shared is relevant. The preacher's mandate is to continue calling and challenging people to move to greater levels of commitments through the faithful preaching of God's Word.

Bill Hybels offer this practical advice to preaching for total commitment:

> Develop a clear understanding of total commitment. A teacher constantly has to define and redefine: What does it really mean to be completely devoted to Christ? If it doesn't mean simply showing up for services, putting in a check, and going home then what does it mean? ... preach on total commitment from as many creative angles as possible. Select series that lead naturally to a call for commitment. In a sense, every sermon I preach defines some aspect of commitment, whether it's about marriage, character development, caring for our bodies, or whatever. Still I believe the call to devotion is best presented overtly, and some series don't lend themselves to that as naturally as others.[97]

In *Preaching for Adult Conversion and Commitment*, Frank Honeycutt states, "Belief, repentance, and commitment" are aspects that "a pastor's preaching ministry will...wisely revisit...on a regular basis."[98] Bill Hull wrote, "The pastor's primary role is to faithfully set the standard for what it means to be a Christian. The pastor defines normal; he tells the congregation what it means to be a disciple."[99]

Rick Warren makes use of preaching as a strategy for reaching the unchurched. He mentions, "Adapt your style to your audience; make the Bible accessible to

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[96] 1 Corinthians 9:16.

[97] Bill Hybels, "Preaching for Total Commitment", *Christianity Today International/Leadership Journal*, http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/currenttrendscolumns/leadershipweekly/cln81229.html, accessed July 23, 2010.

[98] Frank G. Honeycutt, *Preaching for Adult Conversion and Commitment* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004), 108

[99] B. Hull, *Building*, 129.

unbelievers, provide an outline with scriptures written out, plan your titles to appeal to the unchurched, preach in series, and preach for commitment."[100] But, when he writes about developing mature members he fails to mentions preaching.

Tony Evans supplies this insight, "Discipleship is that developmental process of the local church that progressively brings Christians from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity so that they are then able to reproduce the process with someone else."[101] When speaking about the role of preaching in this process, Evans adds, "Sermons are not designed just to give information. The proclamation of the Word, unfolding its meaning and its application to our lives, is designed to call people to respond to God. The response called for is a commitment to obedience."[102] "If a preacher is to do lasting work, work that abides for eternity, expository preaching is his method."[103] If the preachers' desire is for those who listen to them, week after week, to grow in their commitment, expository preaching combined with strategic preaching will be their approach.

Bill Hull's *Building High Commitment in a Low Commitment World*

Now that we have discussed expository preaching and how it can be utilized with strategic preaching to challenge believers to greater levels of commitment the next question is, what is the normal Christian standard for discipleship? Bill Hull declares, "the normal or highly committed Christian lives a disciplined life in which the very

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[100] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 293.
[101] Tony Evans, *What Matters Most: Four Absolute Necessities in Following Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1997), 16.
[102] Evans, *Matters*, 97.
[103] Whitsell, *Expository*, 9.

structures facilitate obedience and impede sin."[104] Hull identifies ten practices for the normal Christian:

> Conversing with God: interacting with Scripture, prayer, and silence & solitude;
> Denials of the Flesh: fasting, frugality, and sacrifice; and
> Serving Christ and His Church: spiritual authority, financial stewardship, willingness to be trained, and personal evangelism.[105]

Nevertheless, Hull acknowledges that there is no fixed number of disciplines. Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline,* describes twelve "classical" disciples in three parts: The Inward Disciplines, The Outward Disciplines and The Corporate Disciples. The Inward Disciplines include meditation, prayer, fasting and studying. The Outward Disciplines include simplicity, solitude, submission and service. The Corporate Disciplines describes confession, worship, guidance and celebration. Hull also recognizes "fifteen identified by Dallas Willard in the *Spirit of the Disciplines.*"[106]

In *What Matters Most,* Tony Evans shares what he professes are the four absolute necessities in following Christ. Evans explores the importance of worship, fellowship, scripture and evangelism as necessities of Christian discipleship. Patrick M. Morley identifies thirty spiritual disciplines, seven that are public, seven that are private and inward, and sixteen that are private and outward in his book *The Seven Seasons of A Man's Life.*[107]

Samuel D. Proctor once suggested that "Ultimately, a deepened commitment will go far to correct our inadequacies. If our commitment to Christ is formal, perfunctory,

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[104] B. Hull, *Building*, 129.
[105] B. Hull, *Building*, 96-116.
[106] B. Hull, *Building*, 96.
[107] Patrick M. Morley, *The Seven Seasons of A Man's Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 201-202.

and thin, our inadequacies will remain glaring."[108] To be like Jesus Christ has to be the true definition of what it means to be a Christian. For purposes of this thesis-project three disciplines have been identified – studying, serving and giving. These disciplines appear in Hull, Foster and Evans in one form or another.

Studying

"If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest. Take the yoke I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest. This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light."[109] Commenting on these verses, Tony Evans explains, "The word for learn is the verb form of the word for 'disciple.' Jesus is saying, 'Come and be discipled by me.' This is a wonderful invitation to the process of discipleship."[110] Rather than using the word "study," Bill Hull describes "Interacting with Scripture" as the disciplines that center on conversation with God. He says, "A Christian cannot grow and develop into anything much without a proactive interaction with God's written revelation."[111] Bill Hull in *Right Thinking,* says, "Transformation comes through the commitment of the mind. Without the proper knowledge and thinking we have no basis for personal change or growth. The mind is the pivotal starting place for change."[112] Hull continues, "Your interaction with the Word can take place on different levels, and its intensity will be determined by your interests and gifts."[113] However, he quickly warns:

> Christians must not be totally dependent on someone else – even their own pastor – for their intake of scriptural food. Any dependence on others

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[108] Samuel D. Proctor, *Preaching About Crises in the Community* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1988), 26.
[109] Matthew 11:28-30 (Contemporary English Version).
[110] Evans, *Matters*, 21.
[111] B. Hull, *Building*, 97.
[112] Bill Hull, *Right Thinking* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1985), 8.
[113] B. Hull, *Building*, 97.

> becomes unhealthy, over the long run, and leads to an "arm's length" relationship with God. A Christian who wants to grow strong must not be fed by osmosis.[114]

Foster adds, "When we come to the Scripture we come to be changed, not to amass information."[115] "The' open secret' of many 'Bible believing' churches is that a vanishingly small percentage of those talking about prayer and Bible reading are actually doing what they are talking about."[116] The preacher's voice should inspire God's people to desire to take God's Word seriously. Strategic expository preaching will produce a passion for the Word of God.

Serving

> So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.[117]

For Bill Hull, one of the three primary dimensions to a normal Christian experience is serving Christ and His Church:

> Serving others so God gets the credit: That is the attitude that makes the church work. Spirit-controlled disciples exhibit selfless service. Good Christians become part of the church in order to serve, for the benefit of others and for the glory of God.[118]

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[114] B. Hull, *Building*, 99.
[115] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978), 60.
[116] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988), 186.
[117] John 13:12-17 (Contemporary English Version).
[118] B. Hull, *Building*, 110-111.

Hull imparts this bit of wisdom: the servant of Christ must work through the Church. He states, "The normal Christian is to be a servant of Christ in and through the church; anything less is aberrant and disobedient."[119]

Foster provides this insight, "As the cross is the sign of submission, so the towel is the sign of service."[120] When Jesus gathered His disciples for the Last Supper "an argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest."[121] Where there is trouble over who is the greatest there is also trouble over who is the least. Foster, describes the scene this way:

> Gathered at the Passover feast the disciples were keenly aware that someone needed to wash the others' feet. The problem was that the only people who washed feet were the least. So there they sat, feet caked with dirt. It was such a sore point that they were not even going to talk about it. No one wanted to be considered the least. Then Jesus took a towel and a basin and so redefined greatness. Having lived out servanthood before them He called them to the way of service: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."[122] In some ways we would prefer to hear Jesus' call to deny father and mother, houses and land for the sake of the gospel, than His word to wash feet. Radical self-denial gives the feel of adventure. If we forsake all, we even have the chance of glorious martyrdom. But in service we are banished to the mundane, the ordinary, the trivial.[123]

Therefore the spiritual authority of which Jesus spoke was an authority not found in a position or a title but in a towel.[124] Tony Evans suggests that fellowship is held together by service to one another. When discussing John 13, Evans mentions, "I'm saying that fellowship, our sharing in the life of Jesus Christ, involves selfless service."[125] Strategic

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[119] B. Hull, *Building*, 111.
[120] Foster, *Celebration*, 110.
[121] Luke 9:46.
[122] John 13:14, 15.
[123] Foster, *Celebration*, 110.
[124] Foster, *Celebration*, 111.
[125] Evans, *Matters*, 161.

expository preaching should challenge believers to perform the spiritual discipline of service.

Giving

"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."[126] Bill Hull says, "There is liberty in the whole issue of giving. It begins with a rule of thumb that God expects a minimum of ten percent, off the top, as an act of faith and allegiance."[127] Foster relates giving to fasting, reminding his reader that Jesus' "teaching on fasting was directly in the context of His teaching on giving and praying. It is as if there is an almost unconscious assumption that giving, praying and fasting are all part of Christian devotion."[128] Giving is a reflection of our stewardship. F. Dean Lueking discusses "stewardship of money. As the Gospels abundantly testify, Jesus was at home on the subject...people in the congregation can move the parish toward greater faithfulness in giving."[129] On the subject of the giving of time, Bill Hybels shares:

> It takes time to develop personal spiritual disciplines – Bible study, journaling, praying, fasting, reflecting. It takes time to be in a small group of brothers or sisters who will provide challenge and accountability. It takes time to advance the kingdom in practical services. But those commitments of time are a good measure of our devotion to Christ.[130]

When speaking on stewardship, Whitsell asks and answers, "Is the stewardship level low in the church? Expository sermons will, in the course of time, cover all the

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[126] Luke 6:38.
[127] B. Hull, *Building*, 112.
[128] Foster, *Celebration*, 46.
[129] Lueking, *Connecting*, 109.
[130] Bill Hybels, "Preaching for Total Commitment", *Christianity Today International/Leadership Journal*, http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/currenttrendscolumns/leadershipweekly/cln81229.html, accessed July 23, 2010.

facets of Christian stewardship without singling it out for an over-emphasis."[131] Haddon Robinson contributes this comment, "A commitment is only cheap talk unless a person puts her money behind it. We want people to be serious about Jesus Christ. And we know that if they are serious about Jesus Christ, they will show it in their giving."[132]

It should be clear that Studying, Serving and Giving should be themes preached to increase the level of commitment in believers. Bill Hull, Richard Foster, and others remind us of other disciplines but they each emphasize at least these three.

It is worth noting that outward compliance to the spiritual discipline is only legalism without the internal conversion of the spirit. H. B. Charles, Jr., "a student of expository preaching," reminds us in a sermon from 2 Corinthians 4:7 titled "God Uses Weak People":

> Let me insert a footnote here: this passage affirms the fact that true spirituality happens from the inside out. Don't miss that. Bible study, sacrificial giving, faithful service, moral living, and church attendance are not adequate reasons to automatically assume that a person is a Christian. No-Christianity is more than the activities of religion. True Christianity is about a relationship with God. It is about faith in God, love for God, and commitment to God, demonstrated through submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Now, don't get me wrong, the external aspects and exercises of Christianity are important, but none of them mean anything if one has a "darkened heart."[133]

Bill Hybels agrees, "We ministers have to make sure our people realize that discipleship is a way to say thank you to God, not a way to gain merit."[134] Bryan Chapell also warns in what he calls, "Be Disciplined Messages":

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[131] Whitsell, *Expository*, 7.

[132] Haddon Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, ed. by Scott M. Gibson, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 149.

[133] Cleophus J. LaRue, ed., *Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare their Sermons* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 50.

[134] Bill Hybels, "Preaching for Total Commitment", *Christianity Today International/Leadership Journal*, http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/currenttrendscolumns/leadershipweekly/cln81229.html accessed July 23, 2010.

> The true efficacy of spiritual disciplines is not their power to bribe God but their usefulness in opening hearts to the perception and exercise of his power. Spiritual disciplines enable those made righteous by Christ's work to breathe more deeply the resources that God freely and lovingly provides for the wisdom, joy, and strength of Christian living. Through disciplines, we inhale more deeply the air God provides for the Christian race, but such disciplines do not produce or maintain the oxygen of God's love. Preachers should encourage more prayer, stewardship, study, and fellowship not to manufacture blessing but so that believers can experience more fully the benefits of union with Christ that God freely offers. With this perspective, disciplines become regular refreshment for those who hunger and thirst for even deeper fellowship with the God they love (Ps. 19:10). The same disciplines, however, will become distasteful duty or bitter pride for those who think that their devotion keeps them on the good side of a God whose measure of live is determined by the grade of their performance.[135]

The spiritual disciplines are not intended to trade grace for works, but to answer the question presented by the Apostle James, "O foolish man, that faith without works is dead"[136] Foster adds:

> When the Disciplines degenerate into law, they are used to manipulate and control people. We take explicit commands and use them to imprison others. The result of such deterioration of the Spiritual Disciplines is pride and fear. Pride takes over because we come to believe that we are the right kind of people. Fear takes over because the power of controlling others carries with it the anxiety of losing control, and the anxiety of being controlled by others.
>
> If we are to progress in the spiritual walk so that the Disciplines are a blessing and not a curse, we must come to the place in our lives where we lay down the everlasting burden of needing to mange others.[137]

The faithful preaching of God's Word should move people to Study, Serve and Give to the glory and honor of God.

The challenge to preach for greater commitment is immense because "the fear of commitment is epidemic in the western world."[138] Jerry White asks, "But surely

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[135] Chapell, *Christ-Centered*, 293.
[136] James 2:20 (NKJV).
[137] Foster, *Celebration*, 8.
[138] White, *Power of Commitment*, 12.

Christian – evangelical Christians – do not fall into the same trap, do we?"[139] But quickly answers, "Unfortunately, we often do. Living in the midst of such a society, we are caught up in a whirlpool so vast that we hardly sense that we are being drawn into its center."[140] Why? White answers:

> It is easy to be a Christian in our society today. It is wholly acceptable, even commendable. It takes so little in the way of commitment to be totally accepted in the world and in the church. The demands are small. Compare this to the level of commitment required in a society where Christians are despised or persecuted.[141]

Bill Hull says, "The pastor speaks from the pulpit and sets the agenda and standards. He preaches high commitment and does not back off on what it means to be a good and mature follower of Jesus."[142] Expository preaching combined with strategic preaching will challenge believers' spiritual disciplines and set forth high commitment as the norm. Nevertheless, there are some other levels of commitment and Rick Warren will help define these different levels

Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church*

If high commitment is the normal Christian standard, what is low commitment or abnormal commitment? How can preachers identify these various levels of commitment? Rick Warren offers five "concentric circles to represent a way of understanding the different levels of commitment and maturity in your Church."[143] Warren adds, "The goal of your Church is to move people from the outer circle (low commitment/maturity) to the

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[139] White, *Power of Commitment*, 12.
[140] White, *Power of Commitment*, 12.
[141] White, *Power of Commitment*, 13.
[142] B. Hull, *Building*, 135.
[143] Warren, *Purpose*, 129. *(See Appendix 3, slide 24)*

inner circle (high commitment/maturity)."[144] Warren is very helpful in defining the various levels of commitment ranging from low to high.

1. ***The Community*** "is the pool of lost people that live within driving distance of your church that have made no commitment at all to either Jesus Christ or to your church. They are the unchurched that you want to reach."[145]
2. ***The Crowd*** "includes everyone who shows up on Sundays for service. They are made up of believers and nonbelievers – all they may have in common is that they are committed to attending a worship service."[146]
3. ***The Congregation*** "is the group of official members of your church. They have been baptized and have made a commitment to be part of your church family. Once people have made a commitment to Christ they need to be encouraged (challenged) to take the next step and commit themselves to Christ's body, the church."[147]
4. ***The Committed*** are "people in your church who are godly and growing – people who are serious about their faith"[148]
5. ***The Core*** "is the smallest group, because it represents the deepest level of commitment. They are the dedicated minority of workers and leaders, those who are committed to ministering to others. They are people that lead and serve in the various ministries of your church."[149]

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[144] Warren, *Purpose*, 131.
[145] Warren, *Purpose*, 131.
[146] Warren, *Purpose*, 131.
[147] Warren, *Purpose*, 132.
[148] Warren, *Purpose*, 133.
[149] Warren, *Purpose*, 134.

Warren's five levels of commitment are invaluable because he attempts to link them to the preaching ministry of Jesus.

> Jesus took into account that people have different cultural backgrounds, understanding, and levels of spiritual commitment. He knew that it doesn't work to use the same approach with all people. The same idea is behind the Circles of Commitment. It is simply a strategy that acknowledges we minister to people at different levels of commitment.[150]

Others recognize this difference in levels of commitment. Tony Evans makes use of 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3 to list four categories: 1) The natural man, 2) Spiritual Man, 3) Babes in Christ and 4) Fleshly or Carnal Christian.[151] Haddon Robinson also notices these different levels of commitment within the crowd to which Jesus shared the Sermon on the Mount:

> Jesus was primarily talking to His dedicated (committed) disciples, but He was aware of those disciples on the spiritual periphery. He also seemed to address the crowds at the end of the sermon when He spoke of narrow and wide gates, trees and their fruit, and wise and foolish builders. So Jesus spoke to three groups: dedicated disciples, uncommitted disciples, and the crowd. [152]

By recognizing these diverse levels of commitment, the biblical preacher can customize sermons to be significant for the target audience.

Preaching for greater levels of commitment is difficult. "Preaching to effect transformation is hard work and risky business. Yet that is the whole point of preaching. There is something so incredible about watching a person who moves from disinterest in God to intense commitment."[153] It takes a great level of commitment on the part of the preacher to create a desire among the people. In Baseball terminology, "A Major League

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[150] Warren, *Purpose*, 136.
[151] Evans, *Matters*, 24-25.
[152] Haddon W. Robinson, *What Jesus said about Successful Living: Principles from the Sermon on the Mount for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1991), 20.
[153] Joseph M. Stowell III "Preaching for a Change," in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 126.

team may *call up* or promote a player from the minor leagues during the season to take a spot on its roster."[154] The preacher must be constantly calling up disciples.

The greatest example is obviously Jesus. He calls us up to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven's team. Barnabas called up Saul of Tarsus to join his mission team, and Paul called up Timothy to be a part of his mission team. Preachers also should be the model of commitment and call up individuals to take part in the vision of the church. Aubrey Malphurs says:

> When people come forth in Christ, they are responsible to move from one level to another. And it's the Church's responsibility to help them in the process. Studies indicate that if someone doesn't come alongside a new convert, the chances are good that they will fall into nominal Christianity. The object of the Church's Strategy is to move them from the lowest level to the highest.[155]

Vines and Shaddix advise, "At other times the purpose will be to *challenge* the people with the call of scripture to total surrender or complete dedication."[156] Preaching for a greater level of commitment requires a clear purpose. Audience analysis is important to determine the congregation's level of commitment. It is likely there will be various levels present at one time. The preacher must decide which level will be challenged in a single sermon. Commend the congregation for their commitment but at the same time challenging them to a greater level. The preacher need not be concern with the size of the congregation, Lueking write, "size is not the key to effective sermons aimed at commitment. It lies in the eye and heart of the one who preaches."[157] Preaching

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[154] Wiktionary term "called up" http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Glossary_of_baseball_jargon_(C) accessed August 10, 2010.
[155] Malphurs, *Ministry,* 141.
[156] Vines, *Power*, 139-140.
[157] Lueking, *Connecting*, 112.

must also supply motivation and provide access to the means for growth in the parish at large.[158]

In conclusion, the aim of preaching that targets greater levels of commitment is to change the mind and behavior of an individual about both their salvation and service. In the postmodern time is which we live, many people attend Church to be entertained but not educated, to be informed but not inspired and thus it becomes increasingly important for the preacher to challenge the people for the work of the Lord. Joe Stowell shares this testimony:

> Scripture reminds me over and over that my life has to match up with what I am preaching. If I am proclaiming the joy of freedom in Christ, then my life needs to show that I am walking in the freedom that He offers. If I am calling God's people to greater levels of commitment and sacrifice for kingdom causes, then I need to be stepping out in faith, seeking to grow in my commitment and willingness to sacrifice. Timothy is reminded of this when Paul tells him to "set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). Nothing hinders our witness for Jesus more than a lack of authenticity. We need to pay attention to the way we live.[159]

As preachers we find ourselves under the call of God, and history will judge not only our commitment but our ability to inspire that commitment in others. Combining expository preaching with strategic preaching will allow preachers to pre-draw their target, aim for greater levels of commitment and use their word arrows effectively.

Strategic Expository Preaching for Greater Commitment

Finally, Ashcraft reminds believers that, "discipleship involves commitment to Christ and His way of life in this world."[160] How do you increase the level of

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[158] Lueking, *Connecting,* 101.
[159] Joe Stowell, "Pay Attention!" *RBC Ministries*, http://www.rbc.org/bible-study/strength-for-the-journey/2009/07/15/daily-message.aspx, accessed July 15, 2009.
[160] Ashcraft, *Christian*, 313.

commitment to Christ through the faithful preaching of God's Word? Bill Hybels, William Hull and others suggests:

- Clearly define the levels of commitment and describe total commitment.[161]
- Clearly demonstrate how commitment is produced through spiritual disciplines.
- Preach with the expectation that believers should reach the core level of commitment.
- Select series that lead naturally to a call for greater commitment.[162]
- Perceptive preachers know that variety is not only the spice of life, but of preaching as well.[163] Use character sketches to demonstrate commitment in the lives of the biblical heroes and heroines of faith.
- Illustrate the alternatives to wholehearted commitment.
- Solicit congregational input.[164]
- Remember what Paul wrote, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."[165]

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[161] Bill Hybels, "Preaching for Total Commitment", *Christianity Today International/Leadership Journal*, http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/currenttrendscolumns/leadershipweekly/cln81229.html, accessed July 23, 2010.
[162] Hybels, *Commitment*, 3.
[163] Robinson, *Biblical Sermons*, 11.
[164] W. Hull, *Strategic*, 73.
[165] 1 Corinthians 3:6-7.

CHAPTER 4. PROJECT DESIGN

Throughout this thesis-project we have focused on the preacher's voice serving as the voice of the Lord, calling and challenging people to greater levels of commitment through the faithful preaching of God's Word. To aid in this endeavor, a workshop have been designed. The three-hour workshop, "Preaching for Greater Commitment," consists of two sessions. The workshop can be scheduled for one weekday evening or a Saturday. One proven format for the Saturday workshop includes a continental Breakfast served during registration prior to the workshop from 9:30 to 10 a.m. Providing a 45-minute working lunch is also highly recommended between the two sessions.

In the first session the Workshop Leader should present a simple guide to building expository sermons based on Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*. The Workshop Leader should be familiar with this book, before attempting to facilitate this session. The session contains two important components: modeling how to discover the central idea of the passage and learning how to analyze one's audience in order to best determine how to apply the biblical truth to the commitment level of the audience. Although commitment is presented fully in the second session it is introduced as part of audience analysis. The workshop offers a simple guide to expository preaching because the target audience will not be familiar with expository preaching, hence will need the confidence of preparing a biblical sermon in order to challenge believers' commitment. Joshua 24:14-15 is a helpful text for both sessions of the Workshop to demonstrate preparing an expository sermon calling for increased commitment.

The second session focuses on evaluating believers' current level of commitment within various ministerial settings while providing ways to challenging them to greater levels of commitment. Understanding where people are will provide a starting point for the preacher to focus on three specific disciplines of the committed Christian: Studying, Serving and Giving. The Workshop Leader should prepare each of these three disciplines but be ready to present one or two depending on allotted time. The content information for the workshop is found in chapters two and three of this project.

The Workshop Leader should be familiar with Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church*, specifically chapter 7 (pg, 131-136) in order to understand the different levels of commitment. Also, the Workshop Leader should be familiar with Bill Hull's *Building High Commitment in a Low Commitment World* in order to provide the basic understanding of spiritual disciplines. Session Two of the workshop emphasizes the importance of determining which of the three spiritual disciplines is more important for the various ministerial settings represented by the participants. This workshop is designed for veteran as well as novice preachers who have developed preaching methods that have served them, but desire to be introduced to a different approach that they can incorporate or adopt, whether or not they have been formally educated in preaching. The author found it important to inform the veteran preachers that Haddon Robinson's sermon method is not the only method, but it is the starting point selected for this Workshop in order to begin a discussion on biblical preaching.

This workshop is designed for an audience that is unfamiliar with expository preaching who come from a background of topical and textual preaching. Lay speakers

and teachers can be invited because the workshop is designed at a level at which they also could benefit.

The intended outcome of this workshop is that the participants should be able to compose biblical sermons with the purpose of challenging believers to move to greater levels of commitment within their particular ministry setting. The goal of Session One is that the participants will become familiar with a simple guide to biblical preaching in order to prepare and present the gospel message clearly and effectively. The two objectives for this session are discovering the central idea of the scripture passage and developing a sermon that is significant to everyday life of their audience.

The goal of Session Two is to properly identify the various levels of commitment present in the participant's congregation. The two objectives of this session are to recognize the various levels of commitment among believers and present one of three disciplines that demonstrate the commitment of believers, anticipating that improving at least one of these spiritual disciplines should be sufficient to reach intended outcome.

This chapter includes some ideas for a helpful workshop setting in which your Workshop can be conducted, a Workshop time schedule and an explanation of a Workshop Evaluation Form. Also, this chapter includes a comprehensive Model Workshop, a suggested copy of a Workshop Evaluation Form you can utilize, a Workshop outline, a Workshop Leader's Guide, work sheets for the passage used in the Workshop, a glossary of important terms, and a brief bibliography for further reference. Appendix 3 provides copies of the Microsoft *PowerPoint*™ presentation.

You may want to the Friday evening prior to the Workshop, hold a worship service featuring an experienced expository preacher in your preaching tradition. The

purpose of the worship service is to demonstrate the major components presented in the workshop and allow those who attend the workshop to see the preaching elements in the context of a service.

Brief Description of Workshop Setting

The workshop is designed to be conducted in a church setting or in a chapel with a separate space for a continental breakfast and lunch. An image projector, a large screen for easy viewing of the *PowerPoint*™ presentation, and a white board to write the responses from the participants are suitable tools.

When the attendees register, each participant should receive a folder containing a pen, post-it notes, handouts of the *PowerPoint*™ slides[1] (printed 3 slides per page with a place for notes) and handouts including the worksheets for the list of statements, the two passages, blank worksheets, a glossary of important terms and a brief bibliography. At the conclusion of the workshop, the participants should be offered a recording of preaching tips from conversations between guest preacher and/or the Workshop Leader along with two sermons samples as a gift for completing the evaluation form.

Proposed Workshop Time Schedule; Saturday

Registration & Continental Breakfast (9:30 am – 10:00 am)

Morning Session (Session One) – (10:00 am – 11:45 am)

Working Lunch (12:00 – 12:45 pm)

Afternoon Session (Session Two) – (1:00 pm – 2:00 pm)

[1] See Appendix 3 for a sample *PowerPoint* Presentation

Workshop Evaluation Form[2]

The Workshop Leader should develop a Workshop Evaluation Form with the intention of receiving feedback from the participants. The Workshop Evaluation Form should have four sections containing 19 questions. The purpose of this evaluation form is to determine if the participants found the workshop to be useful in their preparation of biblical sermons that challenge believers to move to greater levels of commitment. The results from a Workshop Evaluation Form are discussed in Chapter 5.

Questions 1-5 are designed to determine some personal information about the participants, namely: gender, age, ministry position, and range of education.

Questions 6-8 seek to determine if the workshop format is the best way to communicate the Workshop objectives. In this section, the participants are asked to use a Likert scale to indicate if they strongly agreed, agreed, neutral, disagree or strongly disagreed with various components of the workshop format.

Questions 9-12 are directly related to the content of the Workshop to determine if the participants felt the material is understandable and easily applied.

Questions 13-19 are aimed at assessing the Workshop Leader, the visual aids and written material used. Also this section ascertains the feasibility of the workshop and whether the participants would be interested in attending similar workshops in the future.

[2] See Appendix 2: Workshop Evaluation Form

Recommended "Preaching for Greater Commitment" Workshop

Challenging believers to move to greater levels of commitments through the faithful preaching of God's Word

Intended Outcome for the Workshop:

Participants in this workshop will be able to compose biblical sermons with the purpose of challenging believers to move to greater levels of commitment.

Workshop Outline

Morning Session (Session One) (10:00 am – 11:45 am)

Goal of this Session: Participants will become familiar with a simple guide to biblical preaching in order to prepare and present the gospel message clearly and effectively.

- **Objective** – Participants will find the central idea of a Scripture passage.
- **Objective** – Participants will develop a sermon that is significant to the everyday life of their audience by doing an Audience Analysis.

Working Lunch (12:00 – 12:45 pm): Conversation with Host and/or Workshop Leader.

Afternoon Session (Session Two) (1:00 pm – 2:00 pm)

Goal of this Session: Participants will gain an understanding of various levels of commitment within their ministerial setting and incorporate at least one discipline of committed Christians into their biblical preaching to challenge believers to move to greater levels of commitment.

- **Objective** – Participants will identify the various levels of commitment among believers.
- **Objective** – Participants will incorporate the discipline of SERVING into a biblical sermon.

Participants will be asked to complete the Workshop Evaluation Form.

Workshop Leader's Guide
Preaching for Greater Commitment Workshop

It may work best for your group to have a host and a Workshop Leader. The host's role is to consider the physical needs of the group: times, place, refreshments (optional), opening and closing the sessions with prayer, greeting people, gathering information and providing support for the Workshop Leader.

The Workshop Leader leads the workshop. This person prepares the material, hand-outs, and should be familiar with Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*, Bill Hull's *Building High Commitment in a Low Commitment World,* and Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church*, chapter 7 pages 131-136. Also, the Workshop Leader should be knowledgeable of Joshua 24:14-15 in order to lead a discussion on sermon preparation. This Workshop Leader's guide will provide you with ideas for managing the sessions. You are free to adjust, add to and/or ignore these suggestions.

Morning Session (Session One) (10:00 am – 11:45 am)

Provide some introductory comments: This Guide is based on Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*. Haddon Robinson, along with his son Torrey Robinson are careful to state, "There is no such entity as 'the best sermon form.' Sermons can take various forms, but no preaching form came down from Heaven."[3]

In this introductory period you should accomplish four things.

- Introduce participants to each other and to the Workshop Leader.
- Read through Workshop Outline (see above).
- Explain the specific intended outcome of the Workshop and the specific goals of the two Sessions.
- Create a need and desire for the information presented in this Workshop.

[3] Haddon W. Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All in How you Tell It: Preaching First Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003) 10.

Ask the participants, "What is preaching?" *(Allow participants to answer)*[4]

Two biblical descriptions of expository preaching can be found in Luke 24:27 and Acts 28:23 (*Read or have one of the participants read.*)[5] Haddon Robinson's gives this definition of expository preaching:

> Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.[6]

Next, ask "What are some purposes for preaching?" *(Allow participants to answer.)*

In 2 Timothy 4:2 (*Read or have one of the participants read*) Paul gives three purposes for preaching namely: Correct, Rebuke, Encourage. Some other purposes for preaching includes: Comforting, Proving Information, Convicting, Evangelizing, etc.

The focus for this Workshop is preaching for the purpose of "Challenging believers to move to Greater Levels of Commitment." Challenging is defined as "To call to engage in a relationship or action."

Basic Preaching Guide: Step One

The first step of expository preaching is reading and listening to **Scripture**. The participants will analyze the organizational structure of an idea by learning its components. According to Haddon Robinson:

> When reduced to its basic structure, an idea consists of only two essential elements: a *subject* and a *complement*. Both are necessary for an idea to be complete. 'When we talk about the subject of an idea, we mean the complete, definite answer to the question, 'What am I talking about?' The subject as it is

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[4] The Workshop Leader or an assigned person should write down the participants' responses on the white board.

[5] The Workshop Leader should ask the participants to read the various passages.

[6] Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 20.

used in homiletics is not the same thing as a subject in grammar. The subject of a sermon idea can never be only one word. It calls for the precise, full answer to the question, 'What am I talking about?'

A subject cannot stand alone. By itself it is incomplete and therefore it needs a complement. The complement 'completes' the subject by answering the question, 'What am I saying about what I am talking about?' A subject without a complement dangles as an open-ended phrase. Complements without subjects resemble automobile parts not attached to a car. An idea emerges only when the complement is joined to a definite subject. If the words subject and complement confuse you, then try thinking of the subject as a question and your complement as the answer to that question. The two together make up the idea.[7]

The two essential questions preachers must ask about a scripture are:

1. What precisely is the author talking about?
2. What is the author saying about what he is talking about?

Haddon Robinson defines the subject and complement as the "Big Idea," however, the term "Central Idea" may be preferable. The question plus the answer equals the Central idea. Six questions will help in the investigation of any passage: What, Why, When, How, Where and Who. Simply, which question is the passage answering? And what is the answer given in the passage to that question?

At this point in the workshop, it might be helpful to lead a game of *Jeopardy*.[8] This format is very beneficial for the participant to learn to read a statement and formulate a question. Allow 10 – 15 minutes, staying closer to 10 minutes. Start with a simple statement. This exercise is only to determine the **Question**.

1. A good sermon leaves you wondering how the preacher knew all about you.

   Question: How does a good sermon leave you?

2. The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, and the way of salvation.

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[7] Robinson, *Biblical*, 41.

[8] ***Jeopardy!*** is an American game show featuring trivia in a variety of subject areas: history, the arts, pop culture, science, sports, geography, wordplay, and many more. The show provides a unique answer-and-question format in which contestants are presented with clues in the form of statements,, and must phrase their responses in question form.

Question: What does the Bible contain?

3. The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life.

   Question: What is realized the longer you live?

4. The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want.

   Question: Who provides all of my needs?

Next, at the end of the brief game of *Jeopardy*, lead the participants in determining both the Question and the Answer to an extended list of statements (provide copies of Handout on page 101, see below). The following examples are taken from Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*.[9] Ask the participants to identify both the question and its answer in each example. The answers will be given to the students through the workshop discussion.

Exercise: Invite the participants to form into groups of three or four and work with the list of statements and write out the question and answer. Each group should be prepared to present both their questions and answers. Allow 5 – 10 minutes of interaction.

1. Today's pulpit has lost its authority because it has largely ignored the Bible as the source of its message.

   Question: Why has the modern pulpit lost its authority?

   Answer: It has ignored the Bible.

2. The young have lots of time and few memories while the elderly have lots of memories and little time.

   Question: How do the young and the old differ in their memories and their time?

[9] Sample Exercises are given in Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 47-49 answers given on 225-226.

Answer: The young have few memories and lots of time while the elderly have lots of memories.

3. The popular saying has it, "Charity begins at home." It doesn't. Charity begins where love connects with need.

   Question: Where does charity begin?

   Answer: Where it connects with need.

4. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

   Question: Who enters the kingdom of heaven?

   Answer: Those who do the will of the Father.

Exercise: Allow the participants to stay in their groups of three or four and now working with the biblical passage Joshua 24:14-15 identify the question and answer (or the subject and complement). Each group should be prepared to present both their question and answer. Allow 5 – 10 minutes (keep it closer to 5) of interaction.

Once you have the Central idea of the Scripture, next you have to convert the Central Idea of the passage into the central idea of the Sermon, moving from the past to the present. The preacher needs to move from ancient history to current events. There are three developmental questions for the Central Idea of the Sermon:

1. You can **Explain the Idea** – What does it mean?
2. You can **Prove the Idea** – Is it true?
3. You can **Apply the Idea** – How can I use it in my life?

Basic Preaching Guide: Step Two

The second important step of expository preaching is determining the **Significance** of Scripture in the lives of the audience. At this step the preacher should

begin thinking how this passage challenges the level of commitment of the congregation. In this step the preacher should be ready to answer two questions: "TO WHOM?" and "SO WHAT?"

Audience analysis properly identifies the audience for the address (TO WHOM?) and their current level of commitment (SO WHAT?).

When considering answering the TO WHOM question, Haddon Robinson suggests, "Visualize the different kinds of people you'll be talking to – men, women, children. Break these down into subcategories, and rummage around to see if your biblical truth shows up in some situation."[10] The preacher should think about the audience to which the sermon will be presented.

Ask the participants, "Identify some various audiences for which you preach?" *(Allow participants to answer. Examples: All One Gender, Sunday Morning, Youth Group, Funeral Services, etc.)*

The second question the preacher has to answer is SO WHAT? This is where properly identifying the current level of commitment of the audience is important. Thomas Long says, "What the sermon aims to do can be called its 'function.'"[11] This question will be discussed further in the afternoon session (session two).

Concluding the Morning Session (Session One)

In this conclusion period you should accomplish the following:

1. Review Major Concepts: Central Idea and Audience Analysis.
2. Preview Afternoon session (Session Two).

In preparation for the working lunch, you should provide each participant with two note cards. Instruct the participants to write on one note card their hopes about their

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[10] Robinson, *Biblical*, 113.
[11] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989), 86.

preaching and on the other their fears. (For example: My hope is my preaching will challenge people. My fear is that my preaching will cause people to become content.) After collecting the note cards, dismiss the participants to lunch.

Working Lunch (12:00 pm – 12 :45 pm)

While the participants are eating, the Workshop Leader and/or host should group the note cards into two or three broad categories (Role of Holy Spirit in Preaching, Preparation Time, Sermon Elements, Audience Analysis, etc.). The Host can then select representative comments from the note cards and ask the Workshop Leader for a response or the Workshop Leader can select comments directly and provide appropriate responses. Be prepared to answer questions directed from the participants during the lunch period.

Afternoon Session (Session Two) (1:00 pm – 2:00 pm)

Open with a brief introductory period where you should accomplish three things.

1. Review the Central Idea and the Audience Analysis work you did in the previous session.
2. Remind the participants of the work accomplished in developing Joshua 24:14-15 for sermon preparation.
3. Create a need and desire for the participants to challenge believers to move to greater levels of commitment through the faithful preaching of God's Word.

The focus for the Afternoon Session (Session Two) is to examine the second question the preacher has to answer: "SO WHAT?" What is the audience's current level of commitment and what does this message says to challenge them to move to a greater level? Ramesh Richard describes this important step as the "The Purpose Bridge"[12] where you move from studying the passage to applying the idea to the needs of the audience.

[12] Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 77.

Ask the participants, looking at the earlier complied list of various audiences for which they preach, if they can determine the level of commitment? *(For example: Women Retreat, Sunday Morning, Leaders Conference, Youth group, Chapel setting, etc.)* Again, **Commitment** means to entrust our whole being to God. Thomas Long says, "A function statement is a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers."[13] At this point you just want to be able to determine whether or not the specific audience level of commitment is Low, Medium or High. *It is not important for the participants to answer this accurately, the main point is to get them thinking about levels of commitment and how the sermon can be utilized to address the needs of the audience.*

For Example:

1. Youth Group, the attendees probably have a low level of commitment.
2. Women Retreat, the attendees have a medium level of commitment.
3. Leaders Conference, the attendees have a high level of commitment.

Return to Joshua 24. *(It is important to keep a single passage from the earlier session for this session as an example.)* How can this passage be preached to the various audiences? *(For example: How can this passage be significant to a Youth Group?)* That discussion moves us to the next section: How we can identify various levels of Commitment.

The 5 Circles of Commitment in Rick Warren's "*The Purpose Driven Church*"[14] can assist you. It is a good starting point, and should be adjusted for your ministry setting. Warren identifies and defines five levels of commitment:

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[13] Long, *Witness*, 86.

[14] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 130. See Appendix 3, Slide 24 for a copy of the "5 Circles of Commitment."

1. **Community** is the beginning level. It is the pool of lost people that live in our world, who are not committed to Christ or to the local congregation. *(No Commitment)*
2. **Crowd** is the next level. It represents the people who are willing to attend Church functions but do not have a real commitment to Christ or to the local congregation. They have expressed a basic commitment to attend. *(No Commitment)*
3. **Congregation** is the next level of people who have made a commitment to Christ and have joined a local congregation. They are also called "pew members" in that they come on Sunday, but have not made a commitment to personal growth or to participation in ministry of the local congregation. *(Low Commitment)*
4. **Committed** is the next level of commitment. It represents people who have made a commitment to the local congregation and have committed themselves to personal growth and active participation in the life of the Church. They are committed to study, giving, and ministry involvement. *(Medium Commitment)*
5. **Core** is the highest level of commitment. It represents those who have committed themselves to personal growth but also demonstrate a willingness to lead. They are committed to evangelism, ministering and leading others in the local congregation as well as in the larger body of Christ. *(High Commitment)*

This workshop concentrates on those in the Congregation and Committed levels of commitment. Believers who have made a commitment to Christ and to the Church, but yet do not demonstrate commitment through the practice of Spiritual Disciplines.

The questions the preacher has to ask are "How is commitment demonstrated?" and "What Spiritual Discipline is expressed in the passage?" Ask the participants to identify some spiritual disciplines that committed believers demonstrate. *(Allow5-10 minutes for participants to think and answer. For example: Prayer, Fasting, Worship, Giving, Submission, Service, Study, etc. If the participants do not mention the specific discipline which is the focus of this Workshop (e.g.: Service) the Workshop Leader and/or host should mention it.)*

Ask the participants to rank each discipline the group identified as representative of either low, medium or high commitment.

Low is for those disciplines expected of all believers such as praying, personal studying, giving, and serving in some capacity, etc. *Medium* is for those disciplines that relate to believers who have made a commitment to personal spiritual development such as personal and corporate studying, fasting, tithing, and serving. *High* is for those disciplines that requires a greater level of commitment to spiritual development of others such as evangelism, teaching, administration and leading.

In *Building High Commitment in a Low Commitment World* Bill Hull identified ten practices that fall under the three dimensions of the normal Christian experience.[15]

> Conversing with God: interacting with Scripture, prayer, silence and solitude;
> Denials of the Flesh: fasting, frugality, and sacrifice; and
> Serving Christ and His Church: spiritual authority, financial stewardship, willingness to be trained, and personal evangelism.[16]

[15] Bull Hull, *Building High Commitment in A Low Commitment World* (Grand Rapids, MI. Revell, 1995), 96.

[16] For a complete explanation of Bill Hull work see chapter 3.

Looking at the list of audiences (*Women Retreat, Sunday Morning, Minister Conference, Youth group, Chapel Service, etc)* ask the participants whether as a whole are they Low, Medium, or High in their practice of the mentioned spiritual disciplines?

Commitment is demonstrated in Spiritual Disciplines (For example: Serving). *The Workshop Leader should use only one of the above Disciplines.* For example: Serving others is a clear demonstration of believers' commitment to Jesus and His church. Looking at Joshua 24:14-15,[17] ask the participants how commitment is expressed or demonstrated.

Incorporate the understanding of Spiritual Disciplines into the sermon draft developed in the Morning Session (Session One). Joshua 24:14-15 uses the word "Serve" seven times, demonstrating that commitment to God is revealed through our service. Joshua challenges the children of Israel to serve the Lord. The passage states how to serve the Lord: in sincerity and in truth, unlike the fathers, and ends with a personal confession of commitment to serve the Lord. To Illustrate:

Low – Family members will serve in their homes by keeping it clean.
Medium – Church Members will serve the church by volunteering on a general clean-up day.
High – Certain members will serve the larger kingdom of God by participating in a community wide park clean-up project.

Concluding the Afternoon Session (Session Two)

In this conclusion period you should accomplish three things.

1. Review major concepts of the Session Two: Levels of Commitment and their relationship to the Spiritual Disciplines.
2. Review the Workshop's four major elements: Central Idea, Audience Analysis, Levels of Commitment, and Spiritual Disciplines.
3. Provide the following Tips for Preaching for Greater Commitment.

[17] In chapters two and three we provide an exegesis of Joshua 24:14-15 along with the development of three spiritual disciplines. We examined serving in those chapters for the purpose of this workshop.

Tips for Preaching for Greater Commitment:

- Have a clear definition of the level of commitment for which the sermon is intended.
- Clearly demonstrate how commitment is lived out through the use of Spiritual Disciplines.
- Preach with the expectation that all your members should reach the core level of commitment.
- Use Character sketches to demonstrate commitment in the lives of the biblical heroes and heroines of faith.
- Illustrate the alternatives to wholehearted commitment.
- Select series that lead naturally to a call for greater commitment.
- Remember, what Paul writes: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase."[18]

Workshop Conclusion:

Through the faithful preaching of God's Word, believers will be challenged to grow in their commitment. First, preachers must prepare biblically based sermons that demonstrate the demands of commitment on God's people. Secondly, have a clear definition of the various levels of commitment. Thirdly, preachers must be clear about how an individual's commitment is demonstrated in the spiritual disciplines. The preacher who is serious about the Word of God will challenge the hearers also to take God's Word seriously.

Thank the participants for their attendance and ask them to complete the Workshop Evaluation Form. Ask for a show of hands from the participants who might want you to plan another workshop. Tell those who so indicate that opportunity is provided on the Evaluation for them to identify topics which would most interest them. Tell the participants where they may leave their completed Evaluations.

Close in Prayer.

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[18] 1 Corinthians 3:6-7.

Worksheet for identifying questions from statements:

Remember Questions can begin with: What, Why, When, How, Where or Who

1. Today's pulpit has lost its authority because it has largely ignored the Bible as the source of its message.

   Question: _____?

   Answer: _____

2. The young have lots of time and few memories while the elderly have lots of memories and little time.

   Question: _____?

   Answer: _____

3. The popular saying has it, "Charity begins at home." It doesn't. Charity begins where love connects with need.

   Question: _____?

   Answer: _____

4. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

   Question: _____?

   Answer: _____

Passage Outline[19]

Question: _____?

Answer: _____

Passage Central Idea: _____

Major Supporting Points:

I. _____

II. _____

III. _____

Sermon Outline

Sermon Idea: _____

I. _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

II. _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

III. _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Introduction: _____

Conclusion: _____

[19] Provide two worksheets for each participant for analysis of Joshua 24:14-15 and Luke 14:26-35.

Glossary

1. **Audience Analysis** - Finding out the facts about the audience for which the sermon is intended for. The preacher should know the audience's age range, educational range, occupation, cultural interests, prejudices, sex division, and spiritual maturity. Audience analysis properly identifies the audience for the address (TO WHO?) and their current level of commitment (SO WHAT?).

2. **Central Idea** – the main idea of the biblical passage.
    a. Question – What question is the passage answering?
        i. Who?, What?, Why?, Where?, How? and When?
    b. Answer – the answer to the question answered in the passage.

3. **Challenge** – To call to engage in a relationship or action.

4. **Commitment** – To entrust to someone something. (For our purpose – To entrust our whole being to God.)

5. **Developmental Questions**
    a. Explain Idea - What does this mean?
    b. Prove Idea - Is it true?
    c. Apply Idea - What difference does it make? So what?

6. **Expository Preaching** - the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through preacher, applies to the hearers.[20]

7. **Sermon Function** – a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers. Sermons make demands upon the hearers, which is another way of saying that they provoke change in the hearers (even if the change is a deepening of something already present). The function statement names the hoped-for change.[21]

8. **Sermon Outline** – shows the speaker the relationship between the ideas of the sermon and the order in which they will be presented.

9. **Sermon Structure** – the overall arrangement of the sermon including Introduction, Body, Conclusion and Transitions.
    a. **Deductive** – the idea appears as part of the introduction, and the body explains, proves or applies it.
    b. **Inductive** – the idea appears as part of the conclusion, and the body moves from the issues raised toward the solution in the idea.

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[20] Robinson, *Biblical*, 20.
[21] Long, *Witness*, 86.

10. **Transitions** – notifies the audience that the preacher is moving on by stating the connection between the introduction and the body, the points within the body, and the body and the conclusion.

Brief Bibliography

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CHAPTER 5. OUTCOMES

The battle between convenience and commitment is being waged in our culture and indirectly within our churches. With economic uncertainty, advancements in technology and a general uneasiness about life, people avoid making deep commitments. Tragically, convenience has infected and won over many members of the Body of Christ and even some preachers. Some preachers truly desire high commitment among their members and are willing to put their time where their desire is in order to reach that goal. However, many sermons they preach are merely informative, inspirational, comforting and encouraging, but fail to challenge believers especially with an expectation of greater commitment. The question this thesis-project has attempted to answer as restated from the first chapter: "How can preachers move believers to greater levels of commitment?"

The author has determined that the answer is expository and strategic preaching with the objective of increasing commitment levels. The focus of this project is expository preaching used as a strategic tool to expose believers' current commitment and challenge them to greater levels. Therefore, we offered a simple guide to effective expository preaching especially for preachers who do not have a background in such preaching. Also, we examined various levels of commitment along with spiritual disciplines that reflect those various levels. In chapter two, multiple biblical texts were presented that has an emphasis on commitment and chapter three explored the writings of contemporary thinkers on this subject. Chapter four presented a preaching workshop concentrating on basic expository preaching principals and a guide to evaluate commitment levels with the purpose of moving believers to greater levels. Our focus

group was pastors and preachers in the small church setting because Steve R. Bierly states in his book: *How to Thrive as a Small Church Pastor*:

> Ninety percent of the churches in America have fewer than 200 members. This means that large churches and mega churches are definitely in the minority! They may get all the press, but there is a "silent majority" of Christians out there who will never know what it's like to attend one. Statistically speaking, the chances that you will end up pastoring or leading a church that "really takes off" are very slim indeed. The mega church is the exception, not the rule. It grows when there is an unusual combination of timing, location, high-powered clergy, exceptional lay involvement, favorable economic conditions, and special outpourings of the Holy Spirit.[1]

The guiding presupposition for the workshop is a strategic expository preaching system will assist pastors, preachers and teachers of small congregations challenge their current membership and establish intentional progress toward greater commitment. These pastors of congregations that have fewer than two-hundred members, who do not have the budget to build programs nor the staff to facilitate discipleship programs can nevertheless effectively use the preaching event to challenge their membership. The purpose of this project was to assist smaller congregation preachers use their voice to challenge believers to move to greater levels of commitment through the faithful preaching of God's Word.

Again, Larry Gilbert of Church Growth Institute has said, "We need to help pastors turn a 102-member church into a 112-member church. If this consistent growth, however small, were to happen in thousands of churches, it would revolutionize the body of Christ."[2] Although, Larry Gilbert has low expectations, that we should only expect 10 new members unless he is speaking about in every six-months or in a year, but this thesis-project is not about church growth but about increasing commitment within current

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[1] Steve R. Bierly, *How to Thrive as a Small-Church Pastor* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 63.
[2] Larry Gilbert, *Lead or Get out of the Way*, Leadership 16, no. 1 (Summer 1995), 126.

membership. Bill Hull based on his experience gives a more realistic goal. Hull says, "My experience has shown that where high commitment is taught as normal, as many as 50 to 65 percent will achieve it."[3] Since the author does not possess the same level of experience of Mr. Hull, as many as 25 to 35 percent will be a wonderful improvement over the current percentage many small churches labor under today. This project attempts to help those pastors achieve those goals and help revolutionize the Body of Christ.

The workshop about strategic expository preaching described in chapter four was conducted for pastors and preachers to identify current levels of commitment and to challenge believers to move to greater levels of commitment. The workshop was presented on a Saturday, from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm. There were three hours of instruction with one hour for lunch preceded the evening before with a worship service that featured a speaker modeling expository preaching.

Included in this chapter are the results of workshop evaluations, my observations and reflections for the workshop, and project conclusions.

Results of Workshop Evaluations

Although approximately forty-five participants attended the workshop, twenty-seven pastors and preachers completed the evaluation form. Several members of my congregation later explained they felt they did not have to complete an evaluation form. Certain special guests, with whom I have had conversations about the workshop and preaching in general, felt their conversation satisfied my need for input and therefore they did not complete an evaluation. In spite of this, the twenty-seven who did complete the

[3] Bill Hull, *Building High Commitment in a Low Commitment World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1995), 34.

evaluation form provided some helpful insight in the four sections of the Workshop Evaluation form: Personal information, Workshop Format, Workshop Content, and Additional Information.

From the personal information section, I discovered that twenty-one males and six female males attended. I was somewhat surprised by these numbers because I had invited lay speakers and teachers as well as pastors and preachers to the workshop and I thought that the number of female participants would be greater. The age breakdown was as follows: one under 30, eight in the 31-45 age group, twelve between the ages of 46-65, and six indicated they were over 65. I expected a majority of the participants would be between the ages of 31-65.

There was more balance in the area of positional titles: twelve indicated their title as Pastor, eight indicated Preacher/but not Pastor, and seven indicated Lay Speaker. Regarding the question of education, there were seven who indicated High School Graduate, seven marked Some College Courses, six marked College Graduate, and seven indicated Seminary Graduate. I thought the education spread within the group was remarkable. I had anticipated a higher percentage would have indicated "High School Graduate" and "Some College Course" but to find that almost half were college and seminary graduates was unanticipated. Although the workshop was designed for those without seminary training, I trust it was helpful for the seminary graduates who attended.

A Likert scale was used for evaluating the workshop format in order to determine the participants' opinions regarding the design of the workshop. The question was, "Is this the best layout to teach preaching for greater commitment or only as part of a seminary course? Overall, the group strongly agreed with the Workshop format.

Nineteen strongly agreed that the workshop was well organized; fifteen strongly agreed that workshop addressed a need directly or indirectly affecting their ministry concerns; fifteen strongly agreed that enough time was allowed for the presentation and the questions. Two indicated "neutral" regarding the question concerning adequate time, which I understand because of the brief time allowed for questions in the second session. A clear majority indicated "strongly agreed" for the Workshop Format on the Workshop Evaluation Form.

In the section regarding Workshop Content, the majority indicating "strongly agree" continued. However, the question asking if the term commitment was clearly defined solicited one "strongly disagree." The same individual also indicated "strongly disagreed" to the next question whether the guide to preaching was understandable and could be easily applied? This was somewhat disturbing because the individual was a male pastor, between the ages of 46 and 65 whose education level was High School graduate. As this was the target audience for the workshop, I was somewhat disappointed with this response. Nevertheless, in retrospect, I can understand this negative opinion because the workshop was presented with the expectation that individuals had an understanding of both the need for challenging for greater commitment and a basic guide to sermon preparation. Also, I do not feel that I did a good job of connecting the first and second session for this particular audience.

In the Additional Information section, fifteen participants indicated their overall experience with the workshop was excellent, ten very good and two good. When asked how often they would participate in another workshop with twelve indicating "Once a year" and fifteen indicating "Twice a year." The feedback from the participants about the

workshop was very positive both orally and from those who completed the evaluation form. The comments were both encouraging and instructive. A large majority rated the Workshop Leader as "Well Prepared" (23 out of 27) and the use of visual aids and written material as "Well needed" or "Supportive."

For completing the Workshop Evaluation Form we gave a CD containing three "Preaching Points" from the Gordon-Conwell Preaching Points Archives by Dr. Haddon Robinson. Also, the CD "Preaching Tips" from pre-recorded conversations between the Worship Speaker and the Workshop Leader. There were four tracks on the CD: Finding the Central Idea, Best Bible Translations, Sign Posting (Alliterations), Memorization vs. Internalization, a sermon introduction from the Workshop Leader and a sermon introduction from the guest speaker.

Workshop Observations and Reflections

My personal observations and reflections concerning the workshop were positive. First, I was pleased that most of the participants were able to grasp the major components of biblical preaching. They demonstrated a great desire to learn how to find the central idea of the passage, how to convert the central idea of the passage to the central idea of the sermon, the deductive and inductive sermon structures, and how to make their sermons significant to their particular audience. The attendees participated with great energy in the morning session and I was more energized as well. The one challenge was keeping the participants focused on the passage as the answer to a question and how to discover the question that it was answering. The exercise or the playing the game of Jeopardy worked great. The participants played with great enthusiasm. They understood

the concept presented in Jeopardy and were grateful for the approach to finding the Big idea presented by Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*.

Secondly, working with one passage seemed to benefit all the participants. Beginning by searching for the central idea and then showing how that single idea forms the central idea of the sermon was received greatly. We took time discussing several suggested central ideas rather than attempting to tell them which was right or wrong. The participants would challenge each other's central idea, and all I had to do was remind them of the personal nature of wording the central idea. One of my objectives was to leave each participant with a rough draft of a sermon based on Joshua 24:14-15 and I think this was somewhat achieved. Rather than a rough draft of a sermon, I believe they were left with a rough draft of a sermon outline. In the future, I will be more deliberate in order to make it obvious to the participants so that they may see the creation of their own sermon that challenges their members' levels of commitment based on their work with the assigned passage. This also may be achieved by making it a stated outcome of the Workshop rather than merely a personal goal of the leader.

My assumption that the participants would see the connection between the first session and the second session was proven wrong. I'm not certain how the luncheon broke continuity between the sessions, but the energy level was definitely lower after lunch. When I repeat the workshop, I would make a greater effort to introduce the second session before lunch, hopefully to increase the level of anticipation for the second part. I thought the involvement at the beginning of session two was wonderful. The participants gave wonderful answers to the questions regarding commitment and levels of commitment. However, I failed to re-connect this portion to the first session. At the

conclusion of the workshop, several commented that there was a lot of information for the time allotted and felt that more time should be allotted for this session. I think that could be accomplished by combining the beginning of this session with the last portion of the first session without increasing the three hours of instruction.

My overall reflections from the two sessions were positive. I felt the first session was strong and the presentation was filled with excitement and energy. In the first session, we only wanted to give a brief guide to biblical preaching. We spent a great amount of time working on discovery of the central idea of the passage and converting it to the central idea of the sermon. Rather than teach the "Big Idea" of Dr. Robinson, with the subject and complement, I chose rather to identify the question the passage is answering and then what that answer is in order to form the central idea. Many of the participants began to understand this process and there were even times when, as they were working together, I could overhear them reminding one another to ask the questions.

The second session should have been incorporated into the central idea of the scripture, the structure of the sermon and the significance to the particular audience more effectively. This could have been accomplished by continuing to deal with the selected passage while showing how it can best be utilized to address the various commitment levels through application and illustrations. For example we could discuss how a sermon based on Joshua 24:14-15 is constructed for a group of denominational leaders who are highly committed versus constructing a sermon for a Sunday morning worship service to a mixed audience. I failed to keep the central idea of the workshop in mind and conduct it toward the intended outcome.

Also, the later portions became a long lecture rather than allowing the participants to continue to be involved in the process. In reflection, I think we should have ended with the audience participating, and allowing them to leave with an unfinished product to complete. An alternative approach would be switching the sessions, having the commitment session in the morning and the preaching guide in the afternoon allowing the central idea of the passage to serve as the bridge between the two sessions.

Finally, I think that attempting to incorporate lay speakers along with pastors and preachers was more than this workshop could handle. A Sunday school teacher simply does not face the same challenges teaching a homogeneous class that a preacher faces preaching to a diverse congregation. Although, the initial portion of the workshop was beneficial to them, the later portions were not and they became a distraction for me as the Workshop Leader trying to incorporate their needs into the presentation.

I thought the continental breakfast as well as the lunch went well. The question and answering session with the worship speaker and the workshop leader was a nice way to cover various topics, comments and questions without having individuals personally ask. Each participant was provided several post-it notes to write their hopes and fears regarding preaching, the workshop leader organized the comments into various categories and ask the worship speaker to provide brief answers. It also, kept the lunch period discussion on the topic of preaching.

Project Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe there is a need for such workshops, especially within various denominations and communities where seminary trained ministers are not the norm. My goal was to present a systematic approach to moving believers to greater

levels of commitment through the preaching event, which I believe was accomplished. I was also able to urge pastors and preachers to use such an approach to challenge their hearers' hearts, minds, and souls toward greater levels of commitment. Through the workshop, I encouraged the participants to utilize their preacher's voice as the voice of authority reminding them that their voice may be the only voice of the Lord some people will ever hear.

This workshop was the beginning of a new forum for preaching education that joins the seminary with the sanctuary, the professor with the preacher while removing the barrier of academic requirements. Although many of the participants indicated that they had seminary training, I realized they will not return to a seminary for additional training. They are willing to attend a one or two day preaching workshop, however, that provides fresh insight into the most significant and visible element of the worship service. Those who had not had any formal seminary training in preaching were excited about the opportunity. Also, I believe having the workshop in the church setting proved to be helpful and more comfortable for those with limited academic experience.

Preachers from diverse backgrounds face the same difficult task of presenting the gospel in a postmodern generation. I am convinced the most effective choice is that of expository preaching that is both biblical and relevant. The preacher's role to challenge believers to move to greater levels of commitment to Jesus Christ can be summed up in the charge given by the apostle Paul to Timothy, "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching."[4] In addition to expository preaching, preachers need to be taught to be strategic in their

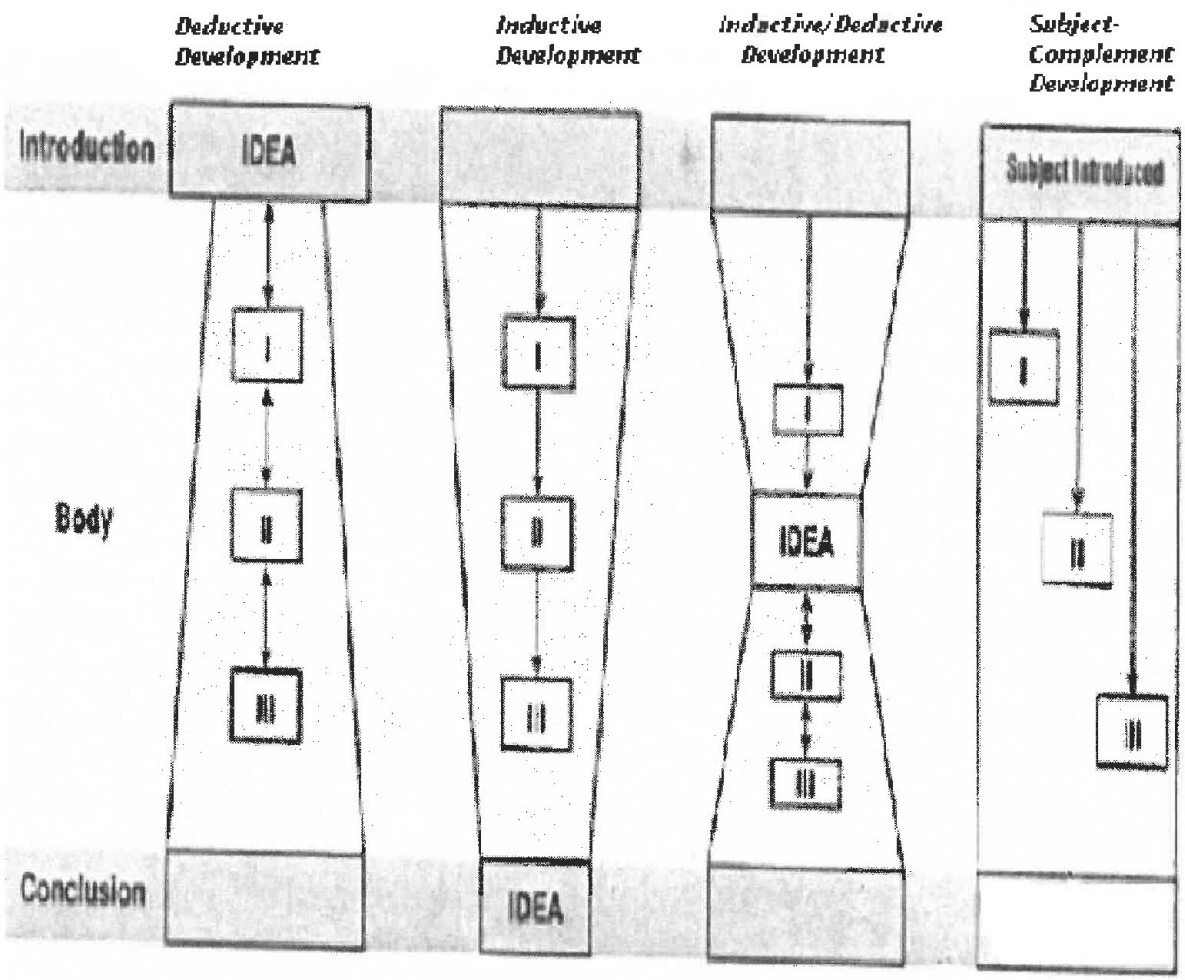
[4] 2 Timothy 4:2 (NKJV).

approach to their audience. Understanding the different commitment levels of the people in the congregation will help make the sermon significant to the hearers.

One of the most enjoyable parts of this project was conducting the workshop for local pastors, preachers and lay speakers. It was gratifying to help them learn some of the preaching principals I learned from Gordon-Conwell professors and especially from Dr. Haddon Robinson. It was a pleasing challenge for me personally to prepare the sessions, trying to keep in mind pastors, preachers and lay speakers who would participate in the workshop. Because pastors have a greater opportunity to preach to a specific congregation, my challenge to teach them was not as great as to lay speakers who have limited opportunities to speak. In the future, I think a trusted associate could present the material to lay speakers. One of the aspects of the workshop from which I received the most feedback verbally was regarding the deductive and inductive sermon structures. Many have not heard of inductive or deductive structure types, and those who had commented that I presented in an understandable way so that they feel more comfortable in utilizing those differences. I truly enjoyed the experience of being able to help fellow ministers think through the preaching process that could help them grow as preachers.

APPENDIX 1: Structuring A Sermon

Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 117



APPENDIX 2: Workshop Evaluation Form

Thank you for attending this preaching workshop. Filling out this evaluation will assist us in two regards. One it will help us determine the feasibility of future preaching workshops and two, as part of the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, I must obtain informative feedback from the participants of this workshop for my thesis-project. Your cooperation in completing this short evaluation will be greatly appreciated.

Please do not write your name anywhere on this evaluation form. Please answer ALL questions based ONLY on today's Workshop. This evaluation should take a maximum of five minutes to complete. You may place them in the marked box. Again, thank you very much.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1) □Male □Female
2) Age Group? □ Under 30 □31-45 □46-65 □Over 65
3) □ Pastor □ Preacher/but not Pastor □ Lay Speaker □ Teacher
4) Education? □ High School Graduate □ Some College Courses
□ College Graduate □ Seminary Graduate
5) Other_____

WORKSHOP FORMAT

Please use the scale to answer the following statements: Circle one

6) The Workshop was well organized.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7) The Workshop addressed a need directly or indirectly affecting my ministry concerns.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8) Enough time was allowed for the presentation and for questions.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

WORKSHOP CONTENT

9) The information presented was clear and well organized.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

10) The focus on "Commitment" suited my ministry needs directly or indirectly.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

11) The guide to preaching was understandable and can be easily applied.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

12) The term "Commitment" was clearly defined.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

13) How would you rate the Workshop Leader?

Well Prepared	*Knowledgeable*	*Unknowledgeable*	*Not Prepared*

14) The use of visual aids and written material was…

Well Needed	*Supportive*	*Distracting*	*Not Needed*

15) The Intended Outcome of the Workshop was accomplished.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

16) Would you participate in another workshop like this one?

□ Not Likely □ Once a Year □ Twice a Year

17) What term best describes your overall experience with this Workshop?

□ Excellent □ Very Good □ Good □ Fair □ Poor

18) This Preaching workshop focused on "Preaching for Commitment." What other topic to you feel would be helpful? Please rank 1-5, with 1 being the highest.

___ "Preaching for Conversion" (Evangelism)

___ "Preaching for Comfort" (Eulogy)

___"Preaching for Encouragement"

___"Preaching to Youth"

___ "The use of visual aids (Multimedia) in Preaching"

_____

_____

19) Please provide any additional comments below.

_____

_____

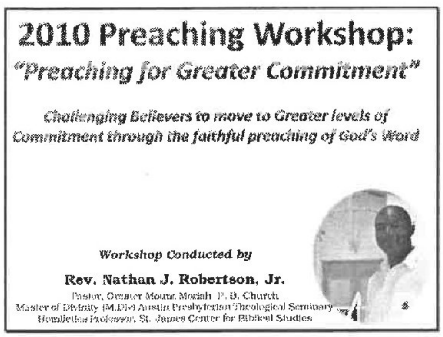
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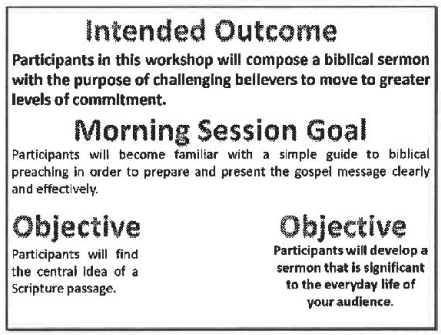
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Thank you for completing this Evaluation. Your opinion and feedback is very valuable as we strive to improve our proclamation of the good news of God's kingdom.

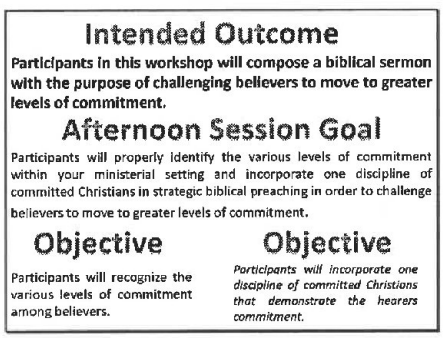
APPENDIX 3: Microsoft PowerPoint™ Workshop Slides



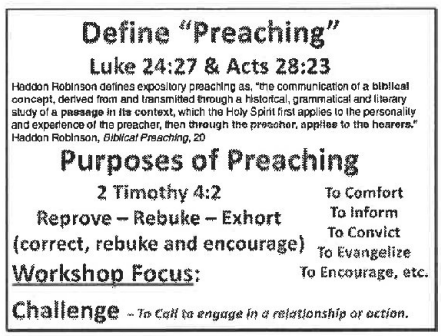
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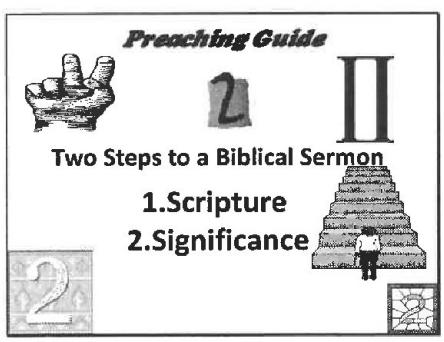
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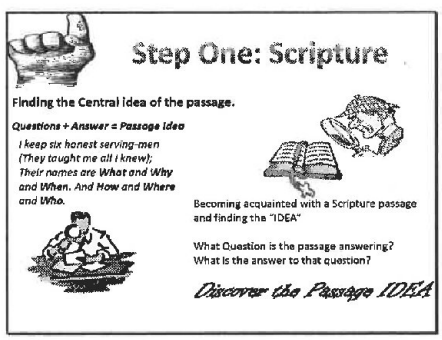
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Slide 4



Slide 5



Slide 6

Bob went to the store to buy eggs and milk.

Questions

Who? What? Why? Where? How? When?

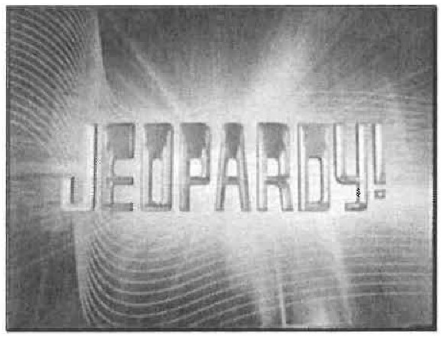
Who – Identity, Person
What – Nature or Value
Why – Purpose, Cause, or Reason
Where – Place, Location
How – In what respect, Manner, Method
When – Time, occasion

Bob and Betty went to the grocery store to buy eggs and milk and the flea market to buy fruit.

Questions

Who? What? Why? Where? How? When?

Slide 7



Slide 8

A good sermon leaves you wondering how the preacher knew all about you.

Question

The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, and the way of salvation.

Question

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life.

Question

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

Question

Slide 9

Joshua 24:14-15

14 Now, therefore, fear the LORD, and serve Him in *sincerity and in truth*: and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. 15 If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Slide 10

Questions

14 Now, therefore, fear the LORD, and serve Him in *sincerity and in truth*: and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.

Who?
What?
Why?
Where?
How?
When?

Slide 11

Questions

15 If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Who?
What?
Why?
Where?
How?
When?

Slide 12

Questions: What did Joshua challenge Israel to do?

Answer: Joshua challenge Israel to fear, serve, and choose the Lord.

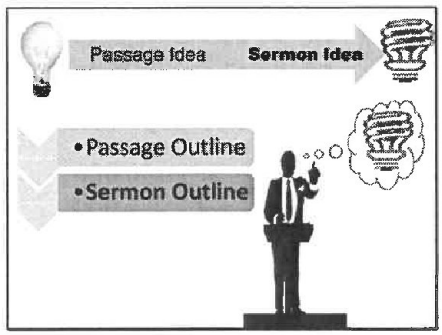
Passage Idea:

Joshua challenges Israel to fear, serve, and choose the LORD over the gods of their past.

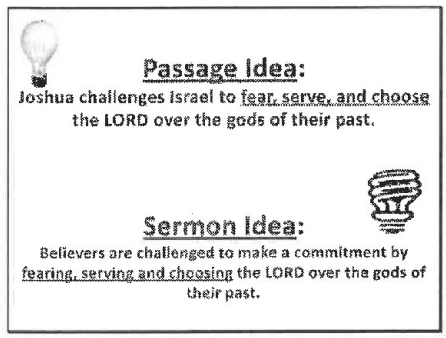
Passage Outline:

I. Joshua challenged Israel to Fear the Lord.
II. Joshua challenged Israel to Serve the Lord.
III. Joshua challenged Israel to Choose the Lord.

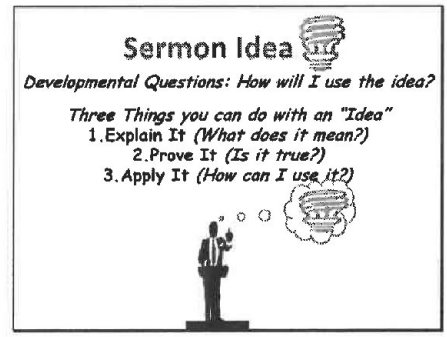
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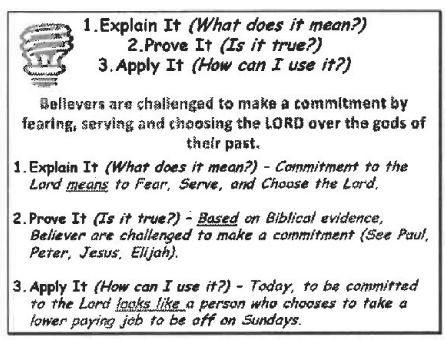
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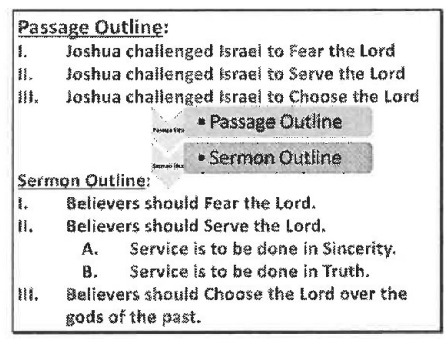
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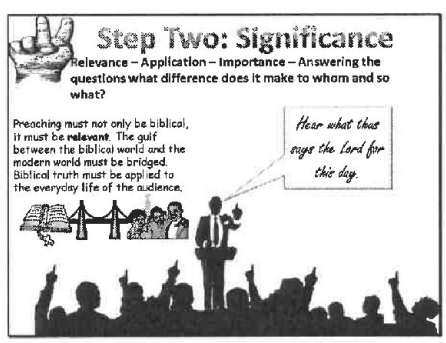
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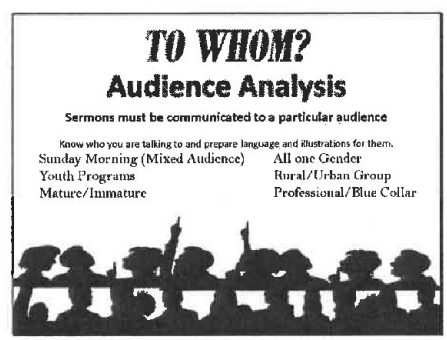
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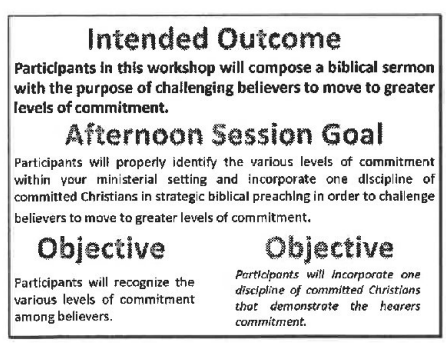
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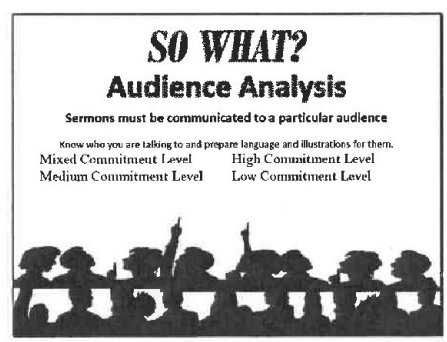
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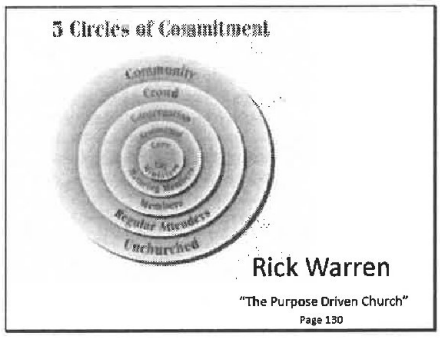
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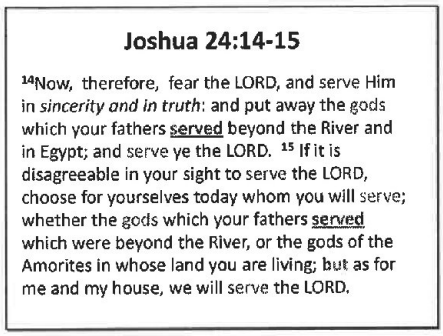
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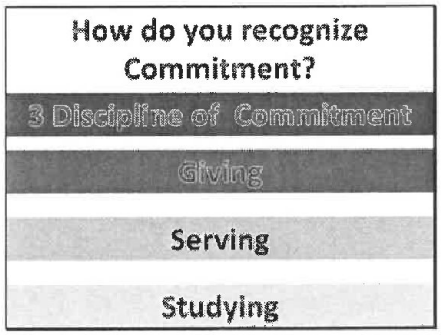
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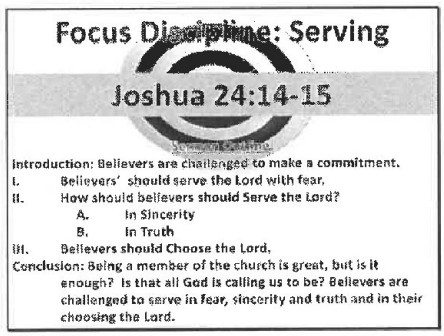
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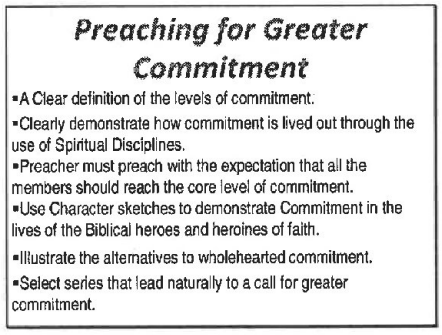
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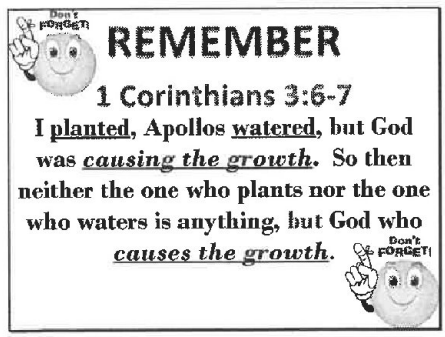
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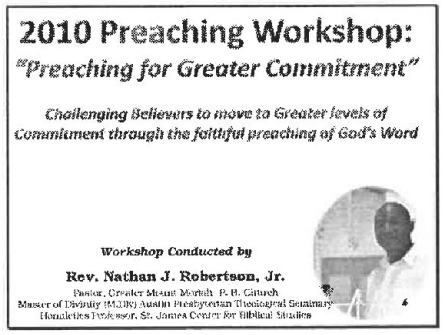
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VITA

Nathan J. Robertson, Jr. was born September 22, 1968, in Austin, Texas, the youngest son of Nathan and Annie Robertson. He grew up in Austin and attended the Austin Independent School District. In 1986, he was granted a football scholarship to Tennessee State University in Nashville Tennessee, where he earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in 1991. In 1996, Nathan began his seminary studies at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas. He graduated from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 2001 with a Master of Divinity degree.

Nathan accepted the call to ministry in 1993 and was licensed to preach at Rehoboth Primitive Baptist Church, Austin, TX. In January 1997, Greater Mount Moriah Primitive Baptist Church called Nathan as their pastor and he was ordained an Elder of the Primitive Baptist Church that year.

More importantly, in 1993, Nathan married Sharon A. Jones and they are the proud parents of two daughters, Hannah Rose and Sarah Rebecca. They currently live in Austin, Texas.

In 2008, Nathan began the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell under Dr. Haddon Robinson. Nathan's studies are anticipated to be completed in May, 2011.